

# Is God a **Trinity?**



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# Is God a Trinity?



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# Introduction

*“But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me . . .” (Jeremiah 9:24).*

**J**ust what is the nature of the true God of the Bible? Is God a Trinity? The Trinity is one of mainstream Christianity's most widely accepted and revered doctrines. The belief that God is three persons coexisting in one being or substance, as the doctrine is often defined, is held by millions of Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox believers alike.

*The Catholic Encyclopedia* calls this belief “the central doctrine of the Christian faith” (1912 edition). Yet, as we'll see, it's been a source of much confusion. Scripture clearly talks about a God who is called the Father, Jesus Christ who is called the Son of God, and a divine Holy Spirit. But how exactly does the Bible define and describe the three?

### A Christian litmus test for many

The doctrine of the Trinity is considered so sacred and fundamental that many churches and religious organizations view it as a litmus test for defining who is and isn't a true Christian.

For example, author and theology professor James White writes: “We hang a person's very salvation upon the acceptance of the doctrine . . . No one dares question the Trinity for fear of being branded a ‘heretic’ . . . We must know, understand, and love the Trinity to be fully and completely Christian” (*The Forgotten Trinity*, 1998, pp. 14-15, emphasis added throughout unless otherwise noted).

*The Teaching of Christ: A Catholic Catechism for Adults* states: “The dogma of the Trinity is the central dogma of Catholic faith. Only with belief in it can one grasp and explicitly believe other central Christian teachings.

“It is impossible to believe explicitly in the mystery of Christ without faith in the Trinity . . . Nor could one grasp the meaning of eternal life, or of the grace that leads to it, without believing in the Trinity, for grace and eternal life are sharing in the Trinitarian life” (Donald Wuerl, Ronald



*This 13th-century fresco in a church in Perugia, Italy, depicts the Trinity as a being with three faces representing Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

Lawler, Thomas Lawler and Kris Stubna, editors, 2005, p. 150).

The book *Catholicism* makes it clear that the Roman church's position is that belief in the Trinity is a necessity for salvation: "Whoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Unless he keep this Faith whole and undefiled, *without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: we worship one God in Trinity*" (George Brantl, editor, 1961, p. 69).

Another source explains: "The doctrine of the Trinity *is the basis of our Christian faith*. Because the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be fully understood, it requires the Holy Spirit to direct our minds to believe" (Randy Smith, *Theological "ism"s, A Layman's Reference Guide to Selected Theological Terms*, 1999, p. 90, quoted by Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition?* 2007, p. 21).

The same source quotes yet another as stating, "*You cannot be saved if you don't believe in the Trinity.*"

This is serious business. Tens of thousands—perhaps *hundreds* of thousands—of Christians have been excommunicated, persecuted and even killed over the doctrine.

Yet even as some demand that we believe in the Trinity, they admit that it's a mystery beyond understanding. Notice this startling statement from *A Handbook of Christian Truth*: "The mind of man cannot fully understand the mystery of the Trinity. *He who has tried to understand the mystery fully will lose his mind; but he who would deny the Trinity will lose his soul*" (Harold Lindsell and Charles Woodbridge, 1953, pp. 51-52).

Is such a position truly reasonable or logical? Would God really deny salvation to us because we are incapable of understanding something that even the most learned theologians admit is incomprehensible?

How can we square that with clear biblical instruction such as the apostle Paul's admonition to believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (King James Version), "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good"?

Or what about 1 Peter 3:15, where the apostle Peter instructs us that we are to "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you"? How can we reconcile that with belief in a doctrine that many theologians admit is, as *The Encyclopedia Americana* puts it, "beyond the grasp of human reason"? (1980, Vol. 27, "The Trinity").

### Theologians admit the Trinity is incomprehensible

Many authoritative sources acknowledge the difficulty of understanding the Trinity doctrine. The German Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner admits, "The dogma of the Trinity is an *absolute mystery* which we do not understand even after it has been revealed" (*The Trinity*, 1986, p. 50, emphasis in original).

Edmund Fortman, another Jesuit scholar, acknowledges: "The doctrine

of the Triune God is *mysterious in its origin and its content* . . . It is a doctrine that revolves about a mystery that has fascinated and challenged the minds of men down the centuries . . . Today it is being challenged by many as *unintelligible and irrelevant* to modern man in its traditional formulation and presentation" (*The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 1972, p. xxv-xxvi).

Author and theology professor Harold Brown writes: "*It has proved impossible for Christians actually to understand the doctrine or to explain it in any comprehensive way. The doctrine of the Trinity . . . surpasses our human ability to understand and that must be respected as a divine mystery*" (*Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church*, 2003, p. 128).

Theology professor James White, quoted earlier, says: "The [Trinity] doctrine is *misunderstood* as well as *ignored*. It is so misunderstood that a majority of Christians, when asked, *give incorrect and at times downright heretical* definitions of the Trinity" (p. 16, emphasis in original).

Theology professor Louis Berkhof states: "The Church confesses the Trinity to be *a mystery beyond the comprehension of man*. The Trinity is a mystery, not merely in the Biblical sense of what is a truth, which was formerly hidden but is now revealed; but in the sense that *man cannot comprehend it and make it intelligible*" (*Systematic Theology*, 1996, p. 89).

Millard Erickson, research professor of theology at Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary, says of the Trinity: "This doctrine in many ways *presents strange paradoxes* . . . It is a *widely disputed* doctrine, which has provoked discussion throughout all the centuries of the church's existence. It is held by many with great vehemence and vigor. These [advocates] consider it crucial to the Christian faith.

"Yet many are unsure of the exact meaning of their belief. It was the very first doctrine dealt with systematically by the church, *yet it is still one of the most misunderstood and disputed doctrines*" (*God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*, 1995, pp. 11-12).

### A doctrine on which to base our faith?

These are surprising admissions about the Trinity—"an absolute mystery," "mysterious in its origin and its content," "impossible for Christians actually to understand," "unintelligible," "misunderstood," "presents strange paradoxes" and "widely disputed." Does this really sound like a doctrine on which to base our faith and salvation—especially when Paul clearly tells us in 1 Corinthians 14:33 that "*God is not the author of confusion*"?

If scholars, theologians and religious authorities admit that we cannot understand such a major doctrine, shouldn't that tell us something may be seriously wrong when it comes to that particular belief?

Again, how are we to understand God's nature?



# Is the Trinity Biblical?

*“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).*

Many people assume that God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit form what is commonly known as the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is usually summed up as a belief in one God existing in three distinct but equal persons.

But did you realize that, even though it is a common assumption among many sincere religious people, the word *Trinity* does not appear anywhere in the Bible? In fact, the word *Trinity* did not come into common use as a religious term until *centuries after* the last books of the Bible were completed—long after the apostles of Christ were gone from the scene!

Notice this admission in the *New Bible Dictionary*: “The term ‘Trinity’ is not itself found in the Bible. It was first used by Tertullian at the close of the 2nd century, but received wide currency [common use in intellectual discussion] and formal elucidation [clarification] *only in the 4th and 5th centuries*” (1996, “Trinity”).

That same source goes on to explain that “the formal doctrine of the Trinity was the result of several inadequate attempts to explain who and what the Christian God really is . . . To deal with these problems the Church Fathers met in [A.D.] 325 at the Council of Nicaea to set out an orthodox biblical definition concerning the divine identity.” However, it wasn’t until 381, “at the Council of Constantinople, [that] the divinity of the Spirit was affirmed” (ibid.).

We see, then, that the doctrine of the Trinity wasn’t formalized *until long after the Bible was completed and the apostles were long dead in their graves*. It took later theologians centuries to sort out what they believed and to formulate belief in the Trinity!

## Why can’t theologians explain this doctrine?

By no means are theologians’ explanations of the Trinity doctrine clear. Religious writer A.W. Tozer, in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, states that the Trinity is an “incomprehensible mystery” and that attempts to understand it “must remain forever futile.” He admits that churches, “without pretending to understand,” have nevertheless continued to teach this doctrine (1961, pp. 17-18).

He then remarkably concludes, “*The fact that it cannot be satisfactorily explained, instead of being against it, is in its favor*” (p. 23).

*The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, in its article on the Trinity, concedes that the Trinitarian concept is humanly incomprehensible: “It is admitted by all who thoughtfully deal with this subject that the Scripture revelation here leads us into the presence of a deep mystery; and that all human attempts at expression are of necessity imperfect” (1988, p. 1308).

Cyril Richardson, professor of church history at New York’s Union Theological Seminary, though a dedicated Trinitarian himself, said this in his book *The Doctrine of The Trinity*:

“My conclusion, then, about the doctrine of the Trinity is that *it is an artificial construct . . . It produces confusion rather than clarification*; and while the problems with which it deals are real ones, the solutions it offers are not illuminating. It has posed for many Christians *dark and mysterious statements, which are ultimately meaningless*, because it does not sufficiently discriminate in its use of terms” (1958, pp. 148-149).

He also admitted, “Much of the defense of the Trinity as a ‘revealed’ doctrine, is really an evasion of the objections that can be brought against it” (p. 16).

*A Dictionary of Religious Knowledge* states regarding the Trinity, “Precisely what that doctrine is, or rather precisely how it is to be explained, Trinitarians are not agreed among themselves” (Lyman Abbott, editor, 1885, “Trinitarians”).

Why do even those who believe in the Trinity find it so difficult to explain?

The answer is simple yet shocking: It’s because the Bible does not teach it! One cannot prove or explain something from the Bible that is not biblical! The Bible is our only reliable source of divine revelation. And the truth, as we will see, is that the Trinity concept simply is not part of God’s revelation to humankind.

But don’t just take our word for it! Let’s see what some standard works of biblical scholarship and other individual scholars say.

## Surprising admissions that the Trinity isn’t in the Bible!

Notice these admissions from a number of reputable sources and authors who, while themselves affirming the Trinity, acknowledge that the word “Trinity” and the doctrine is not found in the Bible.

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* acknowledges that “‘trinity’ is a second-century term *found nowhere in the Bible*, and the Scriptures *present no finished trinitarian statement*” (1988, Vol. 4, “Trinity,” p. 914). It further states that “church fathers crystallized the doctrine in succeeding centuries”—long after the apostles had passed from the scene.

*The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* tells us, “The formal doctrine of the Trinity as it was defined by the great church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries *is not to be found in the NT* [New Testament]” (Paul

Achtemeier, editor, 1996, “Trinity”).

*The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* states: “Today, however, scholars generally agree that *there is no doctrine of the Trinity as such in either the OT [Old Testament] or the NT [New Testament]* . . . It would go far beyond the intention and thought-forms of the OT to suppose that a late-fourth-century or thirteenth-century Christian doctrine can be found there . . . Likewise, the NT *does not contain an explicit doctrine of the Trinity*” (Richard McBrien, general editor, 1995, “God,” pp. 564-565).

*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in its article on the Trinity, explains: “Neither the word *Trinity* nor the explicit doctrine appears in the New Testament . . . The doctrine developed gradually over several centuries and through many controversies . . . *It was not until the 4th century that the distinctness of the three and their unity were brought together in a single orthodox doctrine of one essence and three persons*” (1985 edition, Micropaedia, Vol. 11, p. 928).

*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* points out that “primitive Christianity did not have an explicit doctrine of the Trinity such as was subsequently elaborated in the creeds of the early church” (Colin Brown, editor, Vol. 2, 1976, “God,” p. 84).



Historian and science fiction author H.G. Wells wrote, “There is no evidence that the apostles of Jesus ever heard of the trinity—at any rate from him.”

Historian and science fiction writer H.G. Wells, in his noted work *The Outline of History*, points out, “There is no evidence that the apostles of Jesus ever heard of the trinity—at any rate from him” (1920, Vol. 2, p. 499).

Martin Luther, the German priest who initiated the Protestant Reformation, conceded, “It is indeed true that the name ‘Trinity’ is nowhere to be found in the Holy Scriptures, but has been conceived and invented by man” (reproduced in *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, John Lenker, editor, Vol. 3, 1988, p. 406).

*The Oxford Companion to the Bible* states: “Because the Trinity is such an important part of later Christian doctrine, it is striking that the term does not appear in the New Testament. Likewise, the developed concept of three coequal partners in the Godhead found in later creedal formulations

cannot be clearly detected within the confines of the canon [i.e., actual Scripture]” (Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan, editors, 1993, “Trinity,” p. 782).

Professor Charles Ryrie, in his respected work *Basic Theology*, writes: “Many doctrines are accepted by evangelicals as being clearly taught in

the Scripture for which there are no proof texts. *The doctrine of the Trinity furnishes the best example of this.* It is fair to say that *the Bible does not clearly teach the doctrine of the Trinity* . . . In fact, *there is not even one proof text*, if by proof text we mean a verse or passage that ‘clearly’ states that there is one God who exists in three persons” (1999, p. 89).

Ryrie goes on to state: “The above illustrations prove the fallacy of concluding that if something is not proof texted in the Bible we cannot clearly teach the results . . . If that were so, I could never teach the doctrine of the Trinity” (p. 90).

Millard Erickson, research professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes that the Trinity “*is not clearly or explicitly taught anywhere in Scripture*, yet it is widely regarded as a central doctrine, indispensable to the Christian faith. In this regard, it goes contrary to what is virtually an axiom of biblical doctrine, namely, that there is a direct correlation between the scriptural clarity of a doctrine and its cruciality to the faith and life of the church.

“In view of the difficulty of the subject and the great amount of effort expended to maintain this doctrine, *we may well ask ourselves what might justify all this trouble*” (*God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*, 1995, p. 12).

Professor Erickson further states that the Trinity teaching “is not present in biblical thought, but arose when biblical thought was pressed into this foreign mold [of Greek concepts]. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity *goes beyond and even distorts what the Bible says about God*” (p. 20).

Professor Erickson later points out: “It is claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity is a very important, crucial, and even basic doctrine. If that is indeed the case, *should it not be somewhere more clearly, directly, and explicitly stated in the Bible?* If this is the doctrine that especially constitutes Christianity’s uniqueness . . . how can it be only *implied* in the biblical revelation? . . . For here is a seemingly crucial matter where the Scriptures do not speak loudly and clearly.

“Little direct response can be made to this charge. *It is unlikely that any text of Scripture can be shown to teach the doctrine of the Trinity in a clear, direct, and unmistakable fashion*” (pp. 108-109). Later in this booklet we will consider various scriptures often used to support the Trinity doctrine.



Martin Luther, who initiated the Protestant Reformation, admitted that “the name ‘Trinity’ is nowhere to be found in the Holy Scriptures, but has been conceived and invented by man.”

Shirley Guthrie, Jr., professor of theology at Columbia Theological Seminary, writes: “The Bible *does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity*. Neither the word ‘trinity’ itself nor such language as ‘one-in-three,’ ‘three-in-one,’ one ‘essence’ (or ‘substance’), and three ‘persons,’ is biblical language. The language of the doctrine is the language of the ancient church taken from classical Greek philosophy” (*Christian Doctrine*, 1994, pp. 76-77).”

### The background for how the Trinity was introduced

Since the Trinity is not found in the Bible, as so many scholars and theologians admit, how did it come to be viewed as such an important teaching?

Theology professors Roger Olson and Christopher Hall explain part of the puzzle in their book *The Trinity*: “It is understandable that the importance placed on this doctrine is perplexing to many lay Christians and students. Nowhere is it clearly and unequivocally stated in Scripture . . . How can it be so important if it is not explicitly stated in Scripture? . . .

“The doctrine of the Trinity *developed gradually after the completion of the New Testament* in the heat of controversy, but the church fathers who developed it believed they were simply exegeting [explaining] divine revelation and not at all speculating or inventing new ideas. The full-blown doctrine of the Trinity was spelled out *in the fourth century* at two great ecumenical (universal) councils: Nicea (325 A.D.) and Constantinople (381 A.D.)” (2002, pp. 1-2).

We see from this and other sources quoted above that the idea of a Trinity was foreign to the biblical writers. Instead, as many of these sources openly acknowledge, the doctrine of the Trinity developed considerably later and over a span of several centuries.

To understand the factors that led to the introduction of this belief, we must first go back to see far-reaching and little-understood trends that started in the first few decades of the early Church. It’s a surprising—and in many ways shocking—story!

# The Surprising Origins of the Trinity Doctrine

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Most people assume that everything that bears the label “Christian” must have originated with Jesus Christ and His early followers. But this is definitely not the case. All we have to do is look at the words of Jesus Christ and His apostles to see that this is clearly not true.

The historical record shows that, just as Jesus and the New Testament writers foretold, various heretical ideas and teachers rose up from within the early Church and infiltrated it from without. Christ Himself warned His followers: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name . . . and will deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5).

You can read many similar warnings in other passages (such as Matthew 24:11; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; 2 Peter 2:1-2; 1 John 2:18-19, 26; 4:1-3).

Barely two decades after Christ’s death and resurrection, the apostle Paul wrote that many believers were already “turning away . . . to a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6). He wrote that he was forced to contend with “false apostles, deceitful workers” who were fraudulently “transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:13). One of the major problems he had to deal with was “false brethren” (verse 26).

By late in the first century, as we see from 3 John 9-10, conditions had grown so dire that false ministers openly refused to receive representatives of the apostle John and were excommunicating true Christians from the Church!

Of this troubling period Edward Gibbon, the famed historian, wrote in his classic work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* of a “dark cloud that hangs over the first age of the church” (1821, Vol. 2, p. 111).

It wasn’t long before true servants of God became a marginalized and scattered minority among those calling themselves Christian. A very different religion, now compromised with many concepts and practices rooted in ancient paganism (such mixing of religious beliefs being known as *syncretism*, common in the Roman Empire at the time), took hold and transformed the faith founded by Jesus Christ.

Historian Jesse Hurlbut says of this time of transformation: “We name



the last generation of the first century, from 68 to 100 A.D., ‘The Age of Shadows,’ partly because the gloom of persecution was over the church, but more especially because of all the periods in the [church’s] history, it is the one about which we know the least. We have no longer the clear light of the Book of Acts to guide us; and no author of that age has filled the blank in the history . . .

“For fifty years after St. Paul’s life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church fathers, *we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul*” (*The Story of the Christian Church*, 1970, p. 33).

This “very different” church would grow in power and influence, and within a few short centuries would come to dominate even the mighty Roman Empire!

By the second century, faithful members of the Church, Christ’s “little flock” (Luke 12:32), had largely been scattered by waves of deadly persecution. They held firmly to the biblical truth about Jesus Christ and God the Father, though they were persecuted by the Roman authorities as well as those who professed Christianity but were in reality teaching “another Jesus” and a “different gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6-9).

### Different ideas about Christ’s divinity lead to conflict

This was the setting in which the doctrine of the Trinity emerged. In those early decades after Jesus Christ’s ministry, death and resurrection, and spanning the next few centuries, various ideas sprang up as to His exact nature. Was He man? Was He God? Was He God appearing as a man? Was He an illusion? Was He a mere man who became God? Was He created by God the Father, or did He exist eternally with the Father?

All of these ideas had their proponents. The unity of belief of the original Church was lost as new beliefs, many borrowed or adapted from pagan religions, replaced the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

Let us be clear that when it comes to the intellectual and theological debates in those early centuries that led to the formulation of the Trinity,



*The Roman emperor Constantine the Great, while himself not really a Christian, convened and played a major role in the Council of Nicaea, which laid the groundwork for acceptance of the Trinity doctrine.*

Scott Ashley

the true Church was largely absent from the scene, having been driven underground. (See the chapter “The Rise of a Counterfeit Christianity” in our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built* for an overview of this critical period. Download or request your free copy at [www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)).

For this reason, in that stormy period we often see debates not between truth and error, but *between one error and a different error*—a fact seldom recognized by many modern scholars yet critical for our understanding.

A classic example of this was the dispute over the nature of Christ that led the Roman emperor Constantine the Great to convene the Council of Nicaea (in modern-day western Turkey) in A.D. 325.

Constantine, although held by many to be the first “Christian” Roman Emperor, was actually a sun-worshiper who was only baptized on his deathbed. During his reign he had his eldest son and his wife murdered. He was also vehemently anti-Semitic, referring in one of his edicts to “the detestable Jewish crowd” and “the customs of these most wicked men”—customs that were in fact rooted in the Bible and practiced by Jesus and the apostles.

As emperor in a period of great tumult within the Roman Empire, Constantine was challenged with keeping the empire unified. He recognized the value of religion in uniting his empire. This was, in fact, one of his primary motivations in accepting and sanctioning the “Christian” religion (which, by this time, had drifted far from the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles and was Christian in name only).

But now Constantine faced a new challenge. Religion researcher Karen Armstrong explains in *A History of God* that “one of the first problems that had to be solved was the doctrine of God . . . a new danger arose from within which split Christians into bitterly warring camps” (1993, p. 106).

### Debate over the nature of God at the Council of Nicaea

Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea in the year 325 as much for political reasons—for unity in the empire—as religious ones. The primary issue at that time came to be known as the Arian controversy.

“In the hope of securing for his throne the support of the growing body of Christians he had shown them considerable favor and it was to his interest to have the church vigorous and united. The Arian controversy was threatening its unity and menacing its strength. He therefore undertook to put an end to the trouble. It was suggested to him, perhaps by the Spanish bishop Hosius, who was influential at court, that if a synod were to meet representing the whole church both east and west, it might be possible to restore harmony.

“Constantine himself of course neither knew nor cared anything about the matter in dispute but he was eager to bring the controversy to

a close, and Hosius' advice appealed to him as sound" (Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, 1954, Vol. 1, p. 258).

Arius, a priest from Alexandria, Egypt, taught that Christ, because He was the Son of God, must have had a beginning and therefore was a special creation of God. Further, if Jesus was the Son, the Father of necessity must be older.

Opposing the teachings of Arius was Athanasius, a deacon also from Alexandria. His view was an early form of Trinitarianism wherein the

## Greek Philosophy's Influence on the Trinity Doctrine

Many historians and religious scholars, some quoted in this publication, attest to the influence of Greek or Platonic philosophy in the development and acceptance of the Trinity doctrine in the fourth century. But what did such philosophy entail, and how did it come to affect the doctrine of the Trinity?

To briefly summarize what was pertinent, we start with mention of the famous Greek philosopher Plato (ca. 429–347 B.C.). He believed in a divine triad of "God, the ideas, [and] the World-Spirit," though he "nowhere explained or harmonized this triad" (Charles Bigg, *Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 1886, p. 249).

Later Greek thinkers refined Plato's concepts into what they referred to as three "substances"—the supreme God or "the One," from which came "mind" or "thought" and a "spirit" or "soul." In their thinking, all were different divine "substances" or aspects of the same God. Another way of expressing this was as "good," the personification of that good, and the agent by which that good is carried out. Again, these were different divine aspects of that same supreme good—distinct and yet unified as one.

Such metaphysical thinking was common among the intelligentsia of the Greek world and carried over into the thinking of the Roman world of the New Testament period and succeeding centuries. As the last of the apostles began to die off, some of this metaphysical thinking began to affect and infiltrate the early Church—primarily

through those who had already begun to compromise with paganism.

As Bible scholars John McClintock and James Strong explain: "Towards the end of the 1st century, and during the 2d, many learned men came over both from Judaism and paganism to Christianity. These brought with them into the Christian schools of theology their Platonic ideas and phraseology" (*Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 1891, Vol. 10, "Trinity," p. 553).

The true Church largely resisted such infiltration and held firm to the teaching of the apostles, drawing their doctrine from the writings of the apostles and "the Holy Scriptures [the books of the Old Testament] which are able to make you wise for salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15).

Two distinct threads of Christianity split and developed separately—one true to the plain and simple teachings of the Bible and the other increasingly compromised with pagan thought and practices adopted from the Greco-Roman world.

Thus, as debate swelled over the nature of God in the fourth century leading to the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, it was no longer a debate between biblical truth and error. Both sides in the debate had been seriously compromised by their acceptance of unbiblical philosophical ideas.

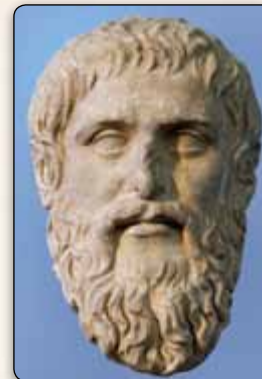
Many of the church leaders who formulated the doctrine of the Trinity were steeped in Greek and Platonic philosophy, and this influenced their

Father, Son and Holy Spirit were one but at the same time distinct from each other.

The decision as to which view the church council would accept was to a large extent arbitrary. Karen Armstrong explains in *A History of God*: "When the bishops gathered at Nicaea on May 20, 325, to resolve the crisis, very few would have shared Athanasius's view of Christ. Most held a position midway between Athanasius and Arius" (p. 110).

As emperor, Constantine was in the unusual position of deciding church

religious views and teaching. The language they used in describing and defining the Trinity is, in fact, taken directly from Platonic and Greek philosophy.



Many historians and religious scholars note that the ideas of the Greek philosopher Plato influenced the development and acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity.

thought was influenced by Plato: its strong point was [pagan] theological speculations. Athanasius and the three Cappadocians [the men whose Trinitarian views were adopted by the Catholic Church at the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople] had been included among its members" (Hubert Jedin, *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: an Historical Outline*, 1960, p. 28).

"The doctrines of the Logos [i.e., the "Word," a designation for Christ in John 1] and the Trinity

received their shape from Greek Fathers, who . . . were much influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Platonic philosophy . . . That errors and corruptions crept into the Church from this source can not be denied" (*The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Samuel Macauley Jackson, editor, 1911, Vol. 9, p. 91).

The preface to historian Edward Gibbons' *History of Christianity* sums up the Greek influence on the adoption of the Trinity doctrine by stating: "If Paganism was conquered by Christianity, it is equally true that Christianity was corrupted by Paganism. The pure Deism [basic religion, in this context] of the first Christians . . . was changed, by the Church of Rome, into the incomprehensible dogma of the trinity. Many of the pagan tenets, invented by the Egyptians and idealized by Plato, were retained as being worthy of belief" (1883, p. xvi). (See "How Ancient Trinitarian Gods Influenced Adoption of the Trinity," beginning on page 18.)

The link between Plato's teachings and the Trinity as adopted by the Catholic Church centuries later is so strong that Edward Gibbon, in his masterwork *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, referred to Plato as "the Athenian sage, who had thus marvelously anticipated one of the most surprising discoveries of the Christian revelation"—the Trinity (1890, Vol. 1, p. 574).

Thus we see that the doctrine of the Trinity owes far less to the Bible than it does to the metaphysical speculations of Plato and other pagan Greek philosophers. No wonder the apostle Paul warns us in Colossians 2:8 (New International Version) to beware of "hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ!"



doctrine even though he was not really a Christian. (The following year is when he had both his wife and son murdered, as previously mentioned).

Historian Henry Chadwick attests, “Constantine, like his father, worshipped the Unconquered Sun” (*The Early Church*, 1993, p. 122). As to the emperor’s embrace of Christianity, Chadwick admits, “His conversion should not be interpreted as an inward experience of grace . . . It was a military matter. His comprehension of Christian doctrine was never very clear” (p. 125).

Chadwick does say that Constantine’s deathbed baptism itself “implies no doubt about his Christian belief,” it being common for rulers to put off baptism to avoid accountability for things like torture and executing criminals (p. 127). But this justification doesn’t really help the case for the emperor’s conversion being genuine.

Norbert Brox, a professor of church history, confirms that Constantine was never actually a converted Christian: “Constantine did not experience any conversion; there are no signs of a change of faith in him. He never said of himself that he had turned to another god . . . At the time when he turned to Christianity, for him this was *Sol Invictus* (the victorious sun god)” (*A Concise History of the Early Church*, 1996, p. 48).



This scene from a monastery in Greece depicts Constantine, in the center, presiding over the Council of Nicaea, with the condemned Arius, whose views of God were rejected, humbled in defeat at the bottom.

The groundwork for official acceptance of the Trinity was now laid—but it took more than three centuries after Jesus Christ’s death and

When it came to the Nicene Council, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* states: “Constantine himself presided, actively guiding the discussions, and personally proposed . . . the crucial formula expressing the relation of Christ to God in the creed issued by the council . . . Overawed by the emperor, the bishops, with two exceptions only, signed the creed, many of them much against their inclination” (1971 edition, Vol. 6, “Constantine,” p. 386).

With the emperor’s approval, the Council rejected the minority view of Arius and, having nothing definitive with which to replace it, approved the view of Athanasius—also a minority view. The church was left in the odd position of officially supporting, from that point forward, the decision made at Nicaea to endorse a belief held by only a minority of those attending.

Wikimedia

resurrection for this unbiblical teaching to emerge!

### Nicene decision didn’t end the debate

The Council of Nicaea did not end the controversy. Karen Armstrong explains: “Athanasius managed to impose his theology on the delegates . . . with the emperor breathing down their necks . . .

“The show of agreement pleased Constantine, who had no understanding of the theological issues, but in fact there was no unanimity at Nicaea. After the council, the bishops went on teaching as they had before, and the Arian crisis continued for another sixty years. Arius and his followers fought back and managed to regain imperial favor. Athanasius was exiled no fewer than five times. It was very difficult to make his creed stick” (pp. 110-111).

The ongoing disagreements were at times violent and bloody. Of the aftermath of the Council of Nicaea, noted historian Will Durant writes, “Probably more Christians were slaughtered by Christians in these two years (342-3) than by all the persecutions of Christians by pagans in the history of Rome” (*The Story of Civilization, Vol. 4: The Age of Faith*, 1950, p. 8). Atrociously, while claiming to be Christian many believers fought and slaughtered one another over their differing views of God!

Of the following decades, Professor Harold Brown, cited earlier, writes: “During the middle decades of this century, from 340 to 380, the history of doctrine looks more like the history of court and church intrigues and social unrest . . . The central doctrines hammered out in this period often appear to have been put through by intrigue or mob violence rather than by the common consent of Christendom led by the Holy Spirit” (p. 119).

### Debate shifts to the nature of the Holy Spirit

Disagreements soon centered around another issue, the nature of the Holy Spirit. In that regard, the statement issued at the Council of Nicaea said simply, “We believe in the Holy Spirit.” This “seemed to have been added to Athanasius’s creed almost as an afterthought,” writes Karen Armstrong. “People were confused about the Holy Spirit. Was it simply a synonym for God or was it something more?” (p. 115).



This 9th-century manuscript shows Constantine, enthroned at upper left, overseeing the burning of Arian books after the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325.

## How Ancient Trinitarian Gods Influenced Adoption of the Trinity

Many who believe in the Trinity are surprised, perhaps shocked, to learn that the idea of divine beings existing as trinities or triads long predated Christianity. Yet, as we will see, the evidence is abundantly documented.

Marie Sinclair, Countess of Caithness, in her 1876 book *Old Truths in a New Light*, states: "It is generally, although erroneously, supposed that the doctrine of the Trinity is of Christian origin. *Nearly every nation of antiquity possessed a similar doctrine.* [The early Catholic theologian] St. Jerome testifies unequivocally, *'All the ancient nations believed in the Trinity'*" (p. 382).

Notice how the following quotes document belief in a divine trinity in many regions and religions of the ancient world.

### Sumeria

"The universe was divided into three regions each of which became the domain of a god. Anu's share was the sky. The earth was given to Enlil. Ea became the ruler of the waters. *Together they constituted the triad of the Great Gods*" (*The Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, 1994, pp. 54-55)

### Babylonia

"The ancient Babylonians *recognised the doctrine of a trinity, or three persons in one god*—as appears from a composite god with three heads forming part of their mythology, and the use of the equilateral triangle, also, as an emblem of such trinity in unity" (Thomas Dennis Rock, *The Mystical Woman and the Cities of the Nations*, 1867, pp. 22-23).

### India

"The Puranas, one of the Hindoo Bibles of more than 3,000 years ago, contain the following passage: 'O ye three Lords! know that I recognize only one God. Inform me, therefore, which of you is the true divinity, that I may address to him alone my adorations.' The three gods, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva [or Shiva],

becoming manifest to him, replied, 'Learn, O devotee, that there is no real distinction between us. What to you appears such is only the semblance. *The single being appears under three forms* by the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, *but he is one.*'

"Hence the triangle was adopted by all the ancient nations as a symbol of the Deity . . . Three was considered among all the pagan nations as the chief of the mystical numbers, because, as Aristotle remarks, it contains within itself a beginning, a middle, and an end. Hence we find it designating some of the attributes of almost all the pagan gods" (Sinclair, pp. 382-383).

### Greece

"In the Fourth Century B.C. Aristotle wrote: 'All things are three, and thrice is all: and let us use this number in the worship of the gods; for, as the Pythagoreans say, everything and all things are bounded by threes, for the end, the middle and the beginning have this number in everything, and these compose the number of the Trinity'" (Arthur Weigall, *Paganism in Our Christianity*, 1928, pp. 197-198).

### Egypt

"The *Hymn to Amun* decreed that 'No god came into being before him (Amun)' and that '*All gods are three: Amun, Re and Ptah, and there is no second to them. Hidden is his name as Amon, he is Re in face, and his body is Ptah.*' . . . *This is a statement of trinity, the three chief gods of Egypt subsumed into one of them, Amon.* Clearly, the concept of organic unity within plurality got an extraordinary boost with this formulation. *Theologically, in a crude form it came strikingly close to the later Christian form of plural Trinitarian monotheism*" (Simson Najovits, *Egypt, Trunk of the Tree*, Vol. 2, 2004, pp. 83-84).

### Other areas

Many other areas had their own divine trinities.

In Greece they were Zeus, Poseidon and Adonis. The Phoenicians worshipped Ulomus, Ulosuros and Eliun. Rome worshipped Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto. In Germanic nations they were called Wodan, Thor and Fricko. Regarding the Celts, one source states, "The ancient heathen deities of the pagan Irish[,] Criosan, Biosena, and Seeva, or Sheeva, are doubtless the Creeshna [Krishna], Veeshnu [Vishnu], [or the all-inclusive] Brahma, and Seeva [Shiva], of the Hindoos" (Thomas Maurice, *The History of Hindostan*, Vol. 2, 1798, p. 171).

### "The origin of the conception is entirely pagan"

Egyptologist Arthur Weigall, while himself a Trinitarian, summed up the influence of ancient beliefs on the adoption of the Trinity doctrine by the Catholic Church in the following excerpt from his previously cited book:



*These gold figurines represent one of the Egyptian trinities of gods—Osiris (center), flanked by Horus (left) and Isis.*

the Church three hundred years after the death of our Lord; *and the origin of the conception is entirely pagan* . . .

"The ancient Egyptians, whose influence on early religious thought was profound, usually arranged their gods or goddesses in trinities: there was the trinity of Osiris, Isis, and Horus, the trinity of Amen, Mut, and Khonsu, the trinity of Khnum, Satis, and Anukis, and so forth . . .

"The early Christians, however, *did not at first think of applying the idea to their own faith.* They paid their devotions to God the Father and to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and they recog-

nized the mysterious and undefined existence of the Holy Spirit; *but there was no thought of these three being an actual Trinity, co-equal and united in One* . . .

"The application of this old pagan conception of a Trinity to Christian theology *was made possible by the recognition of the Holy Spirit as the required third 'Person,' co-equal with the other 'Persons'* . . .

"The idea of the Spirit being co-equal with God *was not generally recognised until the second half of the Fourth Century A.D.* . . . In the year 381 the Council of Constantinople added to the earlier Nicene Creed a description of the Holy Spirit as 'the Lord, and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified.' . . .

"Thus, the Athanasian creed, which is a later composition but reflects the general conceptions of Athanasius [the 4th-century Trinitarian whose view eventually became official doctrine] and his school, formulated the conception of a co-equal Trinity wherein the Holy Spirit was the third 'Person'; and *so it was made a dogma of the faith, and belief in the Three in One and One in Three became a paramount doctrine of Christianity*, though not without terrible riots and bloodshed . . .

"To-day a Christian thinker . . . has no wish to be precise about it, more especially since *the definition is obviously pagan in origin and was not adopted by the Church until nearly three hundred years after Christ*" (pp. 197-203).

James Bonwick summarized the story well on page 396 of his 1878 work *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*: "It is an undoubted fact that *more or less all over the world the deities are in triads.* This rule applies to eastern and western hemispheres, to north and south.

"Further, it is observed that, in some mystical way, the triad of three persons is one. The first is as the second or third, the second as first or third, the third as first or second; in fact, they are each other, one and the same individual being. *The definition of Athanasius, who lived in Egypt, applies to the trinities of all heathen religions.*"



Professor Ryrie, also cited earlier, writes, “In the second half of the fourth century, three theologians from the province of Cappadocia in eastern Asia Minor [today central Turkey] gave definitive shape to the doctrine of the Trinity” (p. 65). They proposed an idea that was a step beyond Athanasius’ view—that God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit were coequal and together in one being, yet also distinct from one another.

These men—Basil, bishop of Caesarea, his brother Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus—were all “trained in Greek philosophy” (Armstrong, p. 113), which no doubt affected their outlook and beliefs (see “Greek Philosophy’s Influence on the Trinity Doctrine,” beginning on page 14).

In their view, as Karen Armstrong explains, “the Trinity only made sense as a mystical or spiritual experience . . . *It was not a logical or intellectual formulation but an imaginative paradigm that confounded reason.* Gregory of Nazianzus made this clear when he explained that contemplation of the Three in One induced a profound and overwhelming emotion that confounded thought and intellectual clarity.

“No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Three than I am carried back into the One. When I think of any of the Three, I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me” (p. 117). Little wonder that, as Armstrong concludes, “For many Western Christians . . . *the Trinity is simply baffling*” (ibid.).

### Ongoing disputes lead to the Council of Constantinople

In the year 381, 44 years after Constantine’s death, Emperor Theodosius the Great convened the Council of Constantinople (today Istanbul, Turkey) to resolve these disputes. Gregory of Nazianzus, recently appointed as archbishop of Constantinople, presided over the council and urged the adoption of his view of the Holy Spirit.

Historian Charles Freeman states: “Virtually nothing is known of the theological debates of the council of 381, but Gregory was certainly hoping to get some acceptance of his belief that the Spirit was consubstantial with the Father [meaning that the persons are of the same being, as *substance* in this context denotes individual quality].

“Whether he dealt with the matter clumsily or whether there was simply no chance of consensus, the ‘Macedonians,’ bishops who refused to accept the full divinity of the Holy Spirit, left the council . . . Typically, Gregory berated the bishops for preferring to have a majority rather than simply accepting ‘the Divine Word’ of the Trinity on his authority” (*A.D. 381: Heretics, Pagans and the Dawn of the Monotheistic State*, 2008, p. 96).

Gregory soon became ill and had to withdraw from the council. Who

would preside now? “So it was that one Nectarius, an elderly city senator who had been a popular prefect in the city as a result of his patronage of the games, but who was still not a baptized Christian, was selected . . . Nectarius appeared to know no theology, and he had to be initiated into the

required faith before being baptized and consecrated” (Freeman, pp. 97-98).

Bizarrely, a man who up to this point wasn’t a Christian was appointed to preside over a major church council tasked with determining what it would teach regarding the nature of God!

### The Trinity becomes official doctrine

The teaching of the three Cappadocian theologians “made it possible for the Council of Constantinople (381) to affirm the divinity of the Holy Spirit, which up to that point *had nowhere been clearly stated, not even in Scripture*” (*The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, “God,” p. 568).

The council adopted a statement that translates into English as, in part: “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages . . . And we believe in the Holy



*Theodosius I, depicted here in a silver plate commemorating the 10th anniversary of his reign as Roman emperor, enforced the decision of the Council of Constantinople establishing the Trinity as official doctrine. All other views of God were condemned as heretical and would not be tolerated.*

Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets . . .” The statement also affirmed belief “in one holy, catholic [meaning in this context universal, whole or complete] and apostolic Church . . .”

With this declaration in 381, which would become known as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Trinity as generally understood today became the official belief and teaching concerning the nature of God.

Theology professor Richard Hanson observes that a result of the council’s decision “was to reduce the meanings of the word ‘God’ from a very large selection of alternatives to one only,” such that “when Western man today says ‘God’ he means the one, sole exclusive [Trinitarian] God and nothing else” (*Studies in Christian Antiquity*, 1985, pp. 243-244).



Thus, Emperor Theodosius—who himself had been baptized only a year before convening the council—was, like Constantine nearly six decades earlier, instrumental in establishing major church doctrine. As historian Charles Freeman notes: “It is important to remember that Theodosius had no theological background of his own and that he put in place as dogma a formula containing intractable philosophical problems of which he would have been unaware. In effect, the emperor’s laws had silenced the debate when it was still unresolved” (p. 103).

### Other beliefs about the nature of God banned

Now that a decision had been reached, Theodosius would tolerate no dissenting views. He issued his own edict that read: “We now order that all churches are to be handed over to the bishops who profess Father, Son and Holy Spirit of a single majesty, of the same glory, of one splendor, who establish no difference by sacrilegious separation, but (who affirm) the order of the Trinity by recognizing the Persons and uniting the Godhead” (quoted by Richard Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God*, 1999, p. 223).

## A Spurious Reference to the Trinity Added in 1 John 5:7-8

Some Bible translators of past centuries were so zealous to find support for their belief in the Trinity in the Scriptures that they *literally added it*. A case in point is 1 John 5:7-8.

It reads in the King James Version, also known as the Authorized Version: “For there are three that bear record *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.*” The words in italics are simply not a part of the generally accepted New Testament manuscripts. Regrettably, in this particular passage some other versions read essentially the same.

Most Bible commentaries that mention this addition tell us that it is a spurious comment added to the biblical text. Consider the words of *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*: “Notice that AV [the Authorized Version] includes additional material at this point. But the words are clearly a gloss [an added note] and are rightly excluded by RSV [the Revised Standard Version] even from its margins” (1970, p. 1269).

In the New Revised Standard Version, 1 John 5:7-8 correctly and more concisely reads, “There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.” John personifies the three elements here as providing testimony, just as Solomon personified wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

Many other more recent Bible versions likewise recognize the spurious added text and omit it, including the New International Version, American Standard Version and New American Standard Bible, English Standard Version, New English Bible and Revised English Bible, New American Bible, Jerusalem Bible and New Jerusalem Bible, Good News Bible, New Living Translation, Holman Christian Standard Bible, Bible in Basic English and the Twentieth Century New Testament.

“The textual evidence is against 1 John 5:7,” explains Dr. Neil Lightfoot, a New Testament professor. “Of all the Greek manuscripts, only two contain it. These two manuscripts are of very late dates, one from the fourteenth or fifteenth century and the other from the sixteenth century. Two

Another edict from Theodosius went further in demanding adherence to the new teaching: “Let us believe the one deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity. We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title of Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since, *in our judgement, they are foolish madmen*, we decree that *they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics*, and shall not presume to give their conventicles [assemblies] the name of churches.

“They will suffer in the first place the chastisement of the divine condemnation, and the second the punishment which our authority, in accordance with the will of Heaven, shall decide to inflict” (reproduced in *Documents of the Christian Church*, Henry Bettenson, editor, 1967, p. 22).

Thus we see that a teaching that was foreign to Jesus Christ, never taught by the apostles and unknown to the other biblical writers, was locked into place and the true biblical revelation about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit was locked out. Any who disagreed were, in accordance with the edicts of the emperor and church authorities, branded heretics and dealt with accordingly.

other manuscripts have this verse written in the margin. All four manuscripts show that this verse was apparently translated from a late form of the Latin Vulgate” (*How We Got the Bible*, 2003, pp. 100-101).

*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* also dismisses the King James and New King James Versions’ additions in 1 John 5:7-8 as “obviously a late gloss with no merit” (Glenn Barker, Vol. 12, 1981, p. 353).

*Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* is very incisive in its comments as well: “The famous interpolation after ‘three witnesses’ is not printed in RSV and rightly [so] . . . No respectable Greek [manuscript] contains it. Appearing first in a late 4th century Latin text, it entered the Vulgate [the 5th-century Latin version, which became the common medieval translation] and finally NT [New Testament] of Erasmus [who produced newly collated Greek texts and a new Latin version in the 16th century]” (p. 1038).

*The Big Book of Bible Difficulties* tells us: “This verse has virtually no support among the early Greek manuscripts . . . Its appearance in late Greek manuscripts is based on the fact that Erasmus was placed under ecclesiastical pressure to include it in his Greek NT of 1522, having omit-

ted it in his two earlier editions of 1516 and 1519 because he could not find any Greek manuscripts which contained it” (Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, 2008, pp. 540-541).

Theology professors Anthony and Richard Hanson, in their book *Reasonable Belief: A Survey of the Christian Faith*, explain the unwarranted addition to the text this way: “It was added by some enterprising person or persons in the ancient Church who felt that the New Testament was sadly deficient in direct witness to the kind of doctrine of the Trinity which he favoured and who determined to remedy that defect . . . It is a waste of time to attempt to read Trinitarian doctrine directly off the pages of the New Testament” (1980, p. 171).

Still, even the added wording does not by itself proclaim the Trinity doctrine. The addition, illegitimate though it is, merely presents Father, Word and Holy Spirit as witnesses. This says nothing about the personhood of all three since verse 7 shows inanimate water and blood serving as such.

Again, the word *Trinity* did not come into common use as a religious term until after the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, several centuries after the last books of the New Testament were complete. It is *not* a biblical concept.

### Trinity doctrine decided by trial and error

This unusual chain of events is why theology professors Anthony and Richard Hanson would summarize the story in their book *Reasonable Belief: A Survey of the Christian Faith* by noting that the adoption of the Trinity doctrine came as a result of “a process of theological exploration which lasted *at least three hundred years* . . . In fact it was a process of trial and error (almost of hit and miss), in which the error was by no means all confined to the unorthodox . . . *It would be foolish to represent the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as having been achieved by any other way*” (1980, p. 172).

They then conclude: “This was a long, confused, process whereby different schools of thought in the Church worked out for themselves, and then tried to impose on others, their answer to the question, ‘How divine is Jesus Christ?’ . . . *If ever there was a controversy decided by the method of trial and error, it was this one*” (p. 175).

Anglican churchman and Oxford University lecturer K.E. Kirk revealingly writes of the adoption of the doctrine of the Trinity: “The theological and philosophical vindication of the divinity of the Spirit begins in the fourth century; we naturally turn to the writers of that period *to discover what grounds they have for their belief*. To our surprise, *we are forced to admit that they have none* . . .

“This *failure of Christian theology . . . to produce logical justification of the cardinal point in its trinitarian doctrine* is of the greatest possible significance. We are forced, even before turning to the question of the vindication of the doctrine by experience, to ask ourselves *whether theology or philosophy has ever produced any reasons why its belief should be Trinitarian*” (“The Evolution of the Doctrine of the Trinity,” published in *Essays on the Trinity and the Incarnation*, A.E.J. Rawlinson, editor, 1928, pp. 221-222).

### Why believe a teaching that isn’t biblical?

This, in brief, is the amazing story of how the doctrine of the Trinity came to be introduced—and how those who refused to accept it came to be branded as heretics or unbelievers.

But should we really base our view of God on a doctrine that isn’t spelled out in the Bible, that wasn’t formalized until three centuries after the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles, that was debated and argued for decades (not to mention for centuries since), that was imposed by religious councils presided over by novices or nonbelievers and that was “decided by the method of trial and error”?

*Of course not.* We should instead look to the Word of God—not to ideas of men—to see how our Creator reveals Himself!

# How Is God Revealed in the Bible?

“... I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Ephesians 3:14-15).

Most people have their own distinctive opinions of a Supreme Being. But where do these impressions come from? Many are simply reflections of how people perceive God—based on what they’ve heard from others and their own reasoning. As a consequence the word *God* has come to embody a range of meanings, many of them quite foreign to the Bible.

So which meaning is the true one? How does the Creator reveal Himself to man?

God reveals Himself in His Word, the Bible (for proof of its authenticity, download or request our free booklet *Is the Bible True?* at [www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)). The Bible is a book about God and His relationship with human beings. The Scriptures contain a long history of God’s revelation of Himself to man—from the first man Adam to the prophet and lawgiver Moses down through the apostles of Jesus Christ and the early Church.

In contrast to many human assumptions, the Bible communicates a true picture of God. This remarkable book reveals what He is like, what He has done and what He expects of us. It tells us why we are here and reveals His little-understood plan for His creation. This handbook of basic knowledge is fundamentally different from any other source of information. It is genuinely unique because it contains, in many ways, the very signature of the Almighty.

The Creator tells us in His Word, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand . . .’” (Isaiah 46:9-10). He tells us that He alone not only foretells the future but can bring it to pass. What a powerful testimony to the mighty God of the Bible!

But, great as He is, God is not unapproachable. He is not beyond our reach. We *can* come to know our magnificent Creator!

### The real key to understanding God

Inspired by God Himself, the Bible gives us the master key to knowing

Him: “Scripture speaks of ‘things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond our imagining, all prepared by God for those who love him’; and these are what God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit explores everything, *even the depths of God’s own nature*” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10, Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

We need to know—from inspired Scripture itself—who God is and how He relates to and reveals Himself to us. Is God one person, two or three? What did Jesus reveal to us about the nature of God when He continually referred to a Being He called “the Father”? The answers will become evident as we examine what the Scriptures actually tell us.

The first major point we need to understand is that, as stated earlier, God reveals Himself through His Word. The Creator wants men and women to understand Him *as He reveals Himself in the Holy Scriptures*. It’s important that we carefully consider this truth and not read our own ideas—or misconceptions—into His Word.

In the Bible’s first book we find a vital point regarding God’s nature. Genesis 1 records many creative acts of God before He made mankind. But notice verse 26: “Then God said, ‘Let *Us* make man *in Our image, according to Our likeness*.’”

Nowhere in the previous verses of Genesis did God use this phrase, “Let *Us* . . .” Why does Genesis now use this plural expression? Why have Bible translators down through the centuries understood that the plural was necessary in this verse?

Who is the *Us* mentioned here, and why is the plural *Our* also used twice in this sentence? Throughout the first chapter of Genesis the Hebrew word translated “God” is *Elohim*, a plural noun denoting more than one entity. Why did our Creator purposefully use these plural expressions? Is God more than one person? Who and what is He? Does this prove that God is a Trinity, as many assume, or is it teaching us something else? How can we understand?

### We must let the Bible interpret the Bible

One of the most fundamental principles to keep in mind regarding proper understanding of God’s Word is simply this: *The Bible interprets the Bible*. We often must look elsewhere in the Scriptures to see more light regarding the meaning of a particular passage. The New Testament sheds much light on the Old, and vice versa.

We can understand Genesis 1:26 much better in the light of some of the writings of the apostle John. He begins his Gospel by stating: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3).

If you are *with* someone, then you are *other than* and *distinct from* that person. The actual Greek here says the One called the Word was with “*the* God,” while the Word Himself was also “God.” It does not say that the Word was “the God,” for They are not the same entity. Rather, John clearly describes *two* divine Beings in this passage—One called *the God* and another referred to as *God the Word*, who was with Him.

In one sense we could refer to John 1:1 as the real beginning of the Bible. It describes the nature of God as Creator even before the beginning depicted in Genesis 1:1. As *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* states, “John’s distinctive contribution is to show that before the Creation the Word existed” (1970, p. 930).

Consider carefully the context of this crucial chapter of John. Verse 14 explains exactly *whom* this Word actually became: “And the Word *became* *flesh and dwelt among us*, and *we beheld His glory*, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The Word *was conceived in the flesh as a physical human being*—Jesus Christ. Although fully human, He perfectly reflected God’s divine character. As Hebrews 1:2 describes it, Jesus was the “exact representation of [the Father’s] nature” (Holman Christian Standard Bible). (To learn more about Christ’s role as the Word of God, see “In the Beginning Was the Word” beginning on page 36.)

### Jesus Christ—“the Word of life”

Here, then, we have *two* great personages, two uncreated, eternal Beings—the God, or God the Father, and the Word, who became Jesus Christ, both divine—presiding over the creation. As the late British theo-

## Jesus Was Sent by the Father

**T**he preexistent Word, who later became Jesus Christ, was sent to earth by the Father in heaven. The Gospel of John bears record to this truth many times. “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). Verse 34 adds, “For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God.”

Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of *Him who sent Me*, and to finish His work” (John 4:34; compare John 5:30).

But where did Christ come from? The book of John also makes this abundantly clear: “No one has ascended to heaven *but He [Christ] who came down from heaven*, that is, the Son

of Man who [since His ascension] is in heaven” (John 3:13). Jesus further said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). And He also told people of His day: “You are from beneath [the earth]; *I am from above*. You are of this world; *I am not of this world*” (John 8:23).

Jesus explicitly stated: “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father” (John 16:28). Thus, Jesus was sent from the Father and returned to Him, where both now exist together in glory and majesty (John 17:5; Hebrews 8:1; 12:2).



logian F.F. Bruce commented on the opening passages of the Gospel of John: “The Personal Word is *uncreated*, not only enjoying the divine companionship, but sharing the divine essence” (*The Message of the New Testament*, 1972, p. 105). This Word was and is God along *with* the Father.

Later, in his first epistle, John adds to our understanding: “That which was from the beginning, which *we have heard*, which *we have seen with our eyes*, which *we have looked at and our hands have touched*—this we proclaim concerning *the Word of life*” (1 John 1:1, New International Version). Here that same “Word” (Jesus Christ) of John’s Gospel account is called “the Word of life.”

It’s easy to overlook the importance of this crucial verse and read right over its enormous significance. The One who became Jesus Christ, declared to be on the same plane of existence as God the Father, was born as a human being and perceived by and through the physical senses of human beings—particularly of His early inner core of disciples, including the one who wrote these words, John. These men became Christ’s apostles—His emissaries—and were special witnesses of His resurrection.

John wrote that the Word, who was with God from the beginning, lived among them in the human flesh. Because He was born a physical human being, the disciples actually saw, touched, conversed with and listened to One who was, as will become increasingly clear, a member of the *divine family*.

John continues, “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you *the eternal life*, which was *with the Father* and *has appeared to us*” (verse 2, NIV). “The Word of life” in 1 John 1:1 is called “the eternal life” in verse 2.

John goes on to say: “We proclaim to you what we have seen and

## Jesus Christ: “The Rock” of the Old Testament

**T**he apostle Paul affirms that the God the Israelites of the Old Testament knew—the One they looked to as their “Rock” of strength (see Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:2)—was the One we know as Jesus Christ.

Notice what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4: “All our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed [or accompanied] them, and that Rock was Christ.”

Jesus was the One who spoke to Moses and told Him to return to Egypt to bring the Israelites to freedom. Jesus was the LORD (*YHWH*) who caused the plagues to come on Egypt. He was the God who led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wanderings for 40 years. He was the Lawgiver who gave the laws to Moses and spoke to Moses on a regular basis. He was the Lord God who dealt with Israel throughout their national history.

Yes, astounding as it seems, Jesus Christ is the LORD (*YHWH*) spoken of so often in the Old Testament.

heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is *with the Father* and *with his Son, Jesus Christ*” (verse 3, NIV). The Holy Scriptures reveal that God the Father and Jesus Christ form *a divine family* (we’ll discuss this biblical truth in greater detail in following chapters).



*The apostle John makes the incredible statement that “the Word,” who was with God and was God, “became flesh and dwelt among us” as a physical human being.*

They have a distinct and loving family relationship. Addressing the Father, Jesus said, “You loved me *before the world began*” (John 17:24, REB). He refers here not to our limited human love but to the divine love of the heavenly realm.

### Jesus Christ was the Creator!

Not only did the apostle John write the fourth Gospel account and three epistles preserved in the New Testament, but he also penned the book of Revelation. It was here, in the message to the seven churches of Revelation, that Jesus identified Himself as the One who produced God’s creation: “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, *the source* of God’s creation” (Revelation 3:14, REB).

It should be noted that since the word rendered “source” can be translated “beginning,” some take that to mean

Jesus was the first creation. But the sense here is that He was the *beginner* or *origin* of creation, a fact John 1 and other passages make clear.

Yes, Jesus not only died for our sins so we could be reconciled to the Father, but *He is our Creator*. The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:9 that “God . . . created all things *through Jesus Christ*.” As the Creator of all things, Jesus Christ alone could pay the penalty for all sin for all mankind for all time—which is why Peter in Acts 4:12 tells us, “there is no salvation through anyone else; in all the world no other name has been granted to mankind by which we can be saved” (REB).

In Colossians 1:16 Paul further writes: “For by Him [Christ] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. *All things were created through Him and for Him.*”

This passage is all-encompassing. Jesus created “all things . . . that are in heaven”—the entire angelic kingdom, which includes an innumerable number of angels—and the indescribably vast universe, including planet earth. Many

people do not grasp the clear biblical fact that Jesus Christ is our Creator!

The book of Hebrews affirms this wonderful truth as well, stating that God the Father “has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, *through whom also He made the worlds*” (Hebrews 1:2). The abundant witness of the New Testament Scriptures shows that God the Father created everything *through* the Word—the One who later became Jesus Christ. Thus, *both* divine Beings were intimately involved in the creation.

The book of Hebrews presents Christ as the Being through whom the Father brought the world of space and time into existence, and who “sustain[s] all things by his powerful word” (verse 3, NRSV). Scripture, therefore, reveals that Jesus not only *created* the universe, but He also *sustains* it. He is clearly far greater than most have imagined!

### Psalms and the divine family relationship

Key passages in the Psalms contain the sure testimony of God the Father concerning His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. In them we find that the Father testified in advance of the Word’s awesome future role.

The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 2: “For to which of the angels did He ever say: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten you’? And again: ‘I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son’?” (Hebrews 1:5; compare Psalm 2:7; 1 Chronicles 17:13). This was the prophetic destiny of the Word.

Psalm 45:6 also shows the Father testifying about the Son, as Hebrews 1:8 explains in quoting it: “But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, *O God*, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.’”

Many who have read this chapter of Hebrews read right over this verse, failing to grasp its enormous import. The Father called His Son, Jesus Christ, *God*. Christ is not only the Son of God. He *is* God! He is a member of the *family of God*. The Scriptures reveal God in terms of a *family relationship*—God the Father and Jesus the Son are together the God family!

We earlier saw from John 1:14 that the Word, Jesus Christ, “became flesh and dwelt among us . . . as of the only begotten of the Father.” The Greek word *monogenees*, translated “only begotten” in this verse and verse 18, confirms the family relationship between God the Father and the One who became Jesus Christ.

Dr. Spiros Zodhiates, author of several books on the Greek language as used in the Bible, explains: “The word *monogenees* actually is a compound of the word *monos*, ‘alone,’ and the word *genos*, ‘race, stock, family.’ Here we are told that He who came to reveal God—Jesus Christ—is *of the same family, of the same stock, of the same race as God* . . . There is ample evidence in the Scriptures that *the Godhead is a family* . . .” (*Was Christ God? A Defense of the Deity of Christ*, 1998, p. 21, emphasis added).

### Jesus Christ’s existence before Abraham

Several other passages in John’s Gospel reveal significant details that help us understand even more fully who and what Jesus Christ was before His incarnation—His conception in flesh as a human being.

Consider an account later in chapter 1: “The next day John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward Him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, “After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for *He was before me*”’” (verses 29-30; compare verse 15).

John the Baptist was born before Jesus (Luke 1:35-36, 57-60) and began his ministry before Christ began His. Yet John still said of Jesus, “He was *before* me.” Why? Considering the whole of John 1, the reason for John’s words must be that he understood that Jesus was the preexistent Word *prior* to His human birth (John 1:14).

In dealing with accusations from the Pharisees in John 8, Jesus said to them, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from [beside the Father in heaven] and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going” (verse 14).

Later the apostle Paul commented on their lack of understanding, “The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, or understand

## The Apostles Understood Jesus to Be the Creator

**T**he book of Hebrews speaks of the Son of God as the Being through whom God created the worlds (Hebrews 1:2) and who “sustains all things by his powerful word” (verse 3, NRSV). Only God is great enough to do such things.

John confirms that Jesus was the divine Word through whom God created the universe: “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3; see verses 1-3, 14).

Paul states directly that “God . . . created all things through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9). He elsewhere writes of Jesus: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16). He adds in verse

17, “and in Him all things consist.”

The Old Testament presents God as Creator of the universe (Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 40:25-26, 28). When the early Christians said Jesus was the One through whom all things were created, they were clearly saying that *Jesus is God*.

Jesus claimed to be all that God is, and the disciples believed and taught it. They understood that Jesus was “the exact expression of His [the Father’s] nature” (Hebrews 1:3, HCSB) and “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), and that “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9, NRSV).

They understood precisely who He was and still is from His own words and actions. There was no question in their minds. They had seen Him prove it time and time again. They would go to their martyrdom firm in this conviction.



the words of the prophets which are read sabbath by sabbath; indeed, they fulfilled them by condemning him” (Acts 13:27, REB).

Just as in the first century, relatively few people today truly compre-

## Did Jesus Christ Claim to Be God?

In addition to directly claiming in John 8:58 to be the “I AM” and having a Jewish crowd try to stone Him as a result (verse 59), as explained in this chapter, Jesus equated Himself with *YHWH* of the Old Testament in other ways as well. Let’s notice some of these.

Jesus said of Himself, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11). David, in the first verse of the famous 23rd Psalm, declared that “The LORD [*YHWH*] is my shepherd.” Jesus claimed to be judge of all men and nations (John 5:22, 27). Yet Joel 3:12 says the LORD [*YHWH*] “will sit to judge all . . . nations.”

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). Isaiah 60:19 says, “The LORD [*YHWH*] will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory.” Also, David says in Psalm 27:1, “The LORD [*YHWH*] is my light.”

Jesus asked in prayer that the Father would return Him to divine glory: “O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5).

In Revelation 1:17 Jesus says He is the first and the last, which is identical to what *YHWH* says of Himself in Isaiah 44:6: “I am the First and I am the Last.”

There is no question that Jesus understood Himself as the LORD (*YHWH*) of the Old Testament.

When Jesus was arrested, His apparent use of the term “*I AM*” had an electrifying effect on those in the arresting party. “Now when He said to them, ‘I am *He*,’ they drew back and fell to the ground” (John 18:6). Notice here that “He” is in italics, meaning the word was added by the translators and isn’t in the original wording. However, their attempt to make Jesus’ answer more grammatically correct obscures the fact that He was likely again claiming to be the “*I AM*” of the Old Testament Scriptures.

### “I and My Father are one”

Jesus made another statement that incensed Jews of His day in John 10: “I and My Father are

one” (verse 30). That is, the Father and Jesus were both divine. As with declaring Himself the “I AM” in John 8, there was no mistaking the intent of what He said, because “then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him” (John 10:31).

Jesus countered: “Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?” The Jews responded, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, *make Yourself God*” (verses 32-33).

The Jews understood perfectly well what Jesus meant. He was telling them plainly of His divinity.

John 5 also records yet another instance in which Jesus infuriated the Jews with His claims of divinity. It happened just after He healed a crippled man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. The Jews sought to kill Him because He did this on the Sabbath, a day on which the law of God had stated no work was to be done (which they misinterpreted to include what Jesus was doing).

Jesus then made a statement the Jews could take in only one way: “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” Their response to His words? “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath [according to their interpretation of it], but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:16-18).

Jesus was equating His works with God’s works and claiming God as His Father in a special way—and of course, an actual son is the same kind of being as his father.

### Jesus claimed authority to forgive sins

Jesus claimed to be divine in other ways, too. When He healed one paralyzed man, He also said to him, “Son, your sins are forgiven you” (Mark 2:5). The scribes who heard this reasoned He was blaspheming, because, as they rightly understood and pondered, “Who can forgive sins

hend who Jesus was, where He came from, what He is doing and what He will yet do.

Later in John 8, the Jews gathered around Jesus asked Him, “Who do

but God alone?” (verses 6-7).

Responding to the scribes, Jesus said: “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? . . . But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He then addressed the paralytic: “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home” (verses 8-11, NRSV).

The scribes knew Jesus was claiming an authority that belonged to God only. Again, the LORD (*YHWH*) is the One pictured in the Old Testament who forgives sin (Jeremiah 31:34).

### Christ claimed power to raise the dead

Jesus claimed yet another power that God alone possessed—to raise the dead. Notice His statements in John 5:25-29: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live . . . All who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

There was no doubt about what He meant. He added in verse 21, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.” Before Jesus resurrected Lazarus from the dead, He said to Lazarus’ sister Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). And He declared of each person the Father draws to Him in this age, “I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44; see verses 40, 54).

Compare this to 1 Samuel 2:6, which tells us that “the LORD [*YHWH*] kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up.” Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 1:9 that it is “God who raises the dead.”

### Jesus’ special relationship with God the Father

Jesus understood Himself to be unique in His close relationship with God the Father in that He was the only One who could reveal the Father. “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor

does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matthew 11:27).

Dr. William Lane Craig, writing in defense of Christian belief, says this verse “tells us that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God in an exclusive and absolute sense. Jesus says here that his relationship of sonship to God is unique. And he also claims to be the *only one* who can reveal the Father to men. In other words, Jesus claims to be the absolute revelation of God” (*Reasonable Faith*, 1994, p. 246).

He further proclaimed: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

### Christ’s claims to hold people’s eternal destiny

On several occasions Jesus asserted that He was the One through whom men and women could attain eternal life. “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40; compare verses 47, 54). Again, as we’ve already seen, He not only says that people must believe in Him, but also that He will be the One to resurrect them at the end. No mere man can take this role.

Dr. Craig adds: “Jesus held that people’s attitudes toward himself would be the determining factor in God’s judgment on the judgment day. ‘Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God’ (Luke 12:8-9).

“Make no mistake: if Jesus were not the divine son of God, then this claim could only be regarded as the most narrow and objectionable dogmatism. For Jesus is saying that people’s salvation depends on their confession to Jesus himself” (p. 251).

The conclusion is inescapable: Jesus proclaimed Himself to be divine along with the Father and to possess authority and prerogatives that belong only to God!

You make Yourself out to be?” (verse 53). They simply had no idea of the real identity of the One with whom they were speaking. It is the same today. Few people really understand the true origins of Jesus Christ.

He patiently explained, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (verse 56). But how was this possible? The patriarch Abraham lived around 2,000 years before Jesus’ birth. So those who heard Him challenged, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” (verse 57). To this question Jesus gave a stunning response: “Most assuredly, I say to you, *before Abraham was, I AM*” (verse 58).

We should pause for a moment to digest what Jesus said.

He was declaring that His existence preceded that of Abraham. Moreover, the phrase “I AM” was a well-known title of divinity to the Jews. This goes back to Moses’ first encounter with God at the burning bush more than 14 centuries earlier.

### A crucial encounter with Moses

When God on that occasion told Moses he was sending him to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, Moses was concerned about how the Israelites would receive him and the commission God gave him. So he asked God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name? What shall I say to them?’” (Exodus 3:13).

Observe the Creator’s reply: “And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14).

Note also the next verse: “Moreover God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations”’” (verse 15).

As is common in most English translations throughout the Old Testament, the word “LORD” here with capital letters is substituted for the Hebrew consonants *Y-H-W-H* (commonly known as the Tetragrammaton, meaning “four letters”). No one today knows for certain how to pronounce this



*The Bible reveals that the divine Being who later became Jesus Christ was the One who “created all things” and interacted with human beings as the God of the Old Testament.*

Corbis

name, but the most commonly accepted pronunciation now is *Yahweh*. (A common, though erroneous, earlier rendering was *Jehovah*.)

Exodus 6:3 and 15:3 and Numbers 6:22-27 refer to *YHWH* also being God’s name. The name *YHWH* is very similar in meaning to “I AM” (Hebrew *EHYH* or *Eheyeh*). Both imply eternal, self-inherent existence (compare John 5:26). Although impossible to translate accurately and directly into English, *YHWH* conveys meanings of “the One Who Always Exists” or “the Self-Existent One”—both meaning an uncreated Being, “the Eternal One.” This distinction can apply only to God, whose existence is eternal and everlasting. No one made God.

Given this background, therefore, when Jesus said in John 8:58 that He preceded Abraham and referred to Himself with continuous existence using the term “I AM,” there really should be no doubt as to just what He meant. The Jews realized what He meant, which is why they immediately tried to stone Him to death (verse 59). Jesus was saying that He was *the very God of Israel*.

To the Jews, there was no mistaking whom Jesus claimed to be. He said He was the One the nation of Israel understood to be the one true God. By making claim to the name “I AM,” Jesus was saying that *He was the God whom the Hebrews knew as YHWH*. This name was considered so holy that a devout Jew would not pronounce it. This was a special name for God that can refer only to the one true God.

Dr. Norman Geisler, in his book *Christian Apologetics*, concludes: “In view of the fact that the Jehovah of the Jewish Old Testament would not give his name, honor, or glory to another [Isaiah 42:8], it is little wonder that the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth drew stones and cries of ‘blasphemy’ from first-century Jews. The very things that the Jehovah of the Old Testament claimed for himself Jesus of Nazareth also claimed” (2002, p. 331).

### Who was the God of the Old Testament?

As the great “I AM,” Jesus Christ was the guiding Rock who was with the children of Israel in the wilderness when they left Egypt (see Deuteronomy 32:4). Paul wrote: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed [accompanied] them, *and that Rock was Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

The “I AM” of the Old Testament is further described as abounding in “goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). Similarly, the New Testament tells us that Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, today, *and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8).



## "In the Beginning Was the Word"

The apostle John opens his account of the life of Jesus Christ with this declaration: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14).

Thus, this "Word"—the Greek term here is *Logos*—became the flesh-and-blood human being Jesus Christ. And He still bears the name "The Word of God" (Revelation 19:13).

How are we to understand this? God created the universe through this preexistent Word who became Christ. The Word was *with* God and, at the same time, *was* Himself God. Many use this to advance a Trinitarian argument, claiming that two divine persons here are said to be one single being. But is that what is meant?

Note that in the original Greek, the Word was with *"the* God" and was Himself "God" (no *"the"* in this case). The Word was not *the* God, as They were not the same entity. But He was still God.

We should understand "God" here as a *kind* of being—the divine, holy and eternally living *God* kind—as well as the *name* for that kind of being. The apostle Paul says the whole divine family is named after the Father, including Christ and others later added to the family (Ephesians 3:14-15).

Thus, in the beginning was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with the God (the Father) and the Word was also named God Himself! Of course, the Word would not be *named* God unless He was *like* the Father as well. That is to say, God is *who* He was as well as *what* He was (and is).

We have here, then, *two* divine Beings—not a *single* being of three persons as the Trinity teaches. Yet why was the divine Being who became Christ called "the Word"? Just what does this signify?

### The Angel of God's Presence

Of the many Old Testament references to

angels of God, there are a few (Genesis 16:10-13; 22:11-12; Exodus 3:2-6; Judges 13:3-22) where One called "the Angel of the LORD" is also identified as "the LORD." But how can an angel of God be God Himself? This is evidently the same figure referred to as "the Angel of His Presence" in Isaiah 63:9, as well as the "Angel" God sent to lead the Israelites through the wilderness to the Promised Land (Exodus 14:19; 23:20).

The word "Angel" here can cause confusion, as it is typically used to refer to created spirit beings who are lesser than God. However, the Old Testament Hebrew word from which the word "angel" is translated, *malak*, simply means "messenger," as does the New Testament Greek equivalent *angelos* (from which the English word *angel* is derived).

In Hebrew and Greek, those words can mean either a human or spirit messenger. We must look at the context to determine which is meant. In this case, we have *the Messenger of God who is also God*. Clearly, there is only one entity fitting this description. It is an exact parallel to *the Word of God who is also God*.

Consider an Old Testament prophecy declared in the New Testament to refer to John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. God said: "Behold, I send My messenger [*malak*, here John the Baptist], and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger [*malak*] of the covenant [that is, Jesus Christ, Mediator of the New Covenant], in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming" (Malachi 3:1; compare Matthew 11:9-11; Mark 1:1-2; Hebrews 12:24).

The "Lord" here is God, for He comes to "His temple." Yet He is also a Messenger—a *malak*, the term elsewhere rendered angel. Jesus is thus the Lord God. Yet He is also the Messenger of God the Father. And Christ's role as Messenger has great bearing on His distinction as the Word of God.

### The Spokesman and the literal meaning of Logos

As God's Messenger, Jesus spoke on God's behalf. He did so when He came to earth as a man. And He did so at the creation of the

universe. The declaration of John 1:3, that God made everything through the Word who became Christ, is proclaimed in other Scriptures as well (see Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16-17).

This fits perfectly with earlier biblical passages: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:6, 9). Who did the actual speaking? From these references, it is abundantly plain that God the Father did the actual work of creating by, or through, the Word who became Jesus.

Jesus Christ is the One who *spoke* the universe into existence—but only at the Father's behest. Jesus explained this in John 8:28: "I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things." And John 12:49-50: "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave a command, what I should say and what I should speak . . . Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."

Jesus is thus the Father's Spokesman, a role some have equated with the name *Logos*. This is quite legitimate, but the matter requires some explanation since *logos* literally refers not to a speaker but to what is spoken.

What does the Greek term *logos* actually mean? The *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* (1992) offers the following meanings among others: "A word, uttered by a living voice . . . what someone has said . . . a continuous speaking discourse . . . doctrine, teaching . . . reason, the mental faculty of thinking."

The *HCSB Study Bible* notes: "Like the related verb *lego* [to speak], the noun *logos* most often refers to either oral or written communication. It means *statement* or *report* in some contexts" (2010, p. 1801, "Logos," emphasis in original).

Some first-century Jewish usage of the term may relate to the usage in John 1. But this question remains: How are we to understand Christ as what is spoken, the literal meaning of *Logos*, when we know He is the One who speaks for God?

### Both Messenger and Message

By way of answering, let us ask: Should all of Christ's other titles be understood this way? What about "the Alpha and the Omega" in

Revelation 1:8? Is Christ really two letters of the Greek alphabet? What about "the Lamb of God" in John 1:36? Is Christ literally a young sheep? It should be easy to see that titles in the Bible often have figurative meanings.

Consider for a moment that figures of speech must still follow a certain logic. What do *you* think it would mean if you called someone your "Word"? It would, no doubt, be very similar to what Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthian congregation, "You are our *epistle* written in our hearts, known and read by all men" (2 Corinthians 3:2).

The church members in Corinth were not a *literal* epistle or written letter. Paul was using abstract language with an underlying concrete meaning. When you write a letter, you communicate your thoughts to others. The Corinthians, Paul was saying, acted in representation of his ideas. They expressed, through their conduct and words, all that he had taught them and stood for. Isn't this exactly what you would mean if you called someone your "Word"?

*The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* sheds further light on the matter, pointing out: "Words are the vehicle for the revelation of the thoughts and intents of the mind to others. In the Person of the incarnate Logos, God made Himself fully known to man. Nothing knowable by man concerning God is undisclosed by incarnate deity. Christ as the Word constitutes the complete and ultimate divine revelation" (1988, p. 780, "Logos").

Let's consider again Christ's role as God's Messenger. Christ represented the Father exactly. He lived everything the Father commanded and conveyed His Father's thoughts to human beings. He *spoke* on His Father's behalf as God's Spokesman. But the message Christ brought entailed not only speaking. Rather, *His whole life itself* conveyed a message.

Indeed, *Jesus Himself is both Messenger and Message*. The way He lived taught us how to live. His humbling of Himself to come in the flesh and give His life in sacrifice speaks volumes about the unfathomable love of God. Jesus Christ is the Word of God. Everything He said, everything He did, everything He went through is God's Word to us.

There are, it should be noted, places in the Old Testament where *YHWH* clearly refers to God the Father. For instance, in Psalm 110:1, King David stated, “The LORD [*YHWH*] said to My Lord . . .” *YHWH* here is the Father speaking to David’s Lord, the One who became Jesus Christ. Often, however, the name *YHWH* refers to the One who became Christ—and sometimes it applies to both the Father and Christ together, just as the name *God* often does.

Consider that except for Jesus, no human being has ever seen the Father (John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 1 John 4:12). Yet Abraham, Jacob, Moses and others all saw God (Genesis 18; 32:30; Exodus 24:9-11; 33:17-23). So the *YHWH*, the “I AM,” the Word, who later became Jesus Christ was the One they saw. It was He who dealt directly with human beings as God in Old Testament times.

Jesus Christ later died for our sins and became the ultimate mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), a role He had already partially fulfilled as the preexistent Word before His human birth.

So the Word was indeed the God of the Old Testament—and yet the Father fulfilled this role in a very real sense as well. For Jesus dealt with mankind on the Father’s behalf as His Spokesman (compare John 8:28;

## The Claim of Jesus’ Disciples

The statements of those who personally knew and were taught by Jesus, and who then wrote most of the New Testament, are thoroughly consistent with Jesus’ declarations about Himself. His disciples were monotheistic Jews. For them to agree that Jesus was God, and then to give their lives for this belief, tells us that they had come to see for themselves that the claims Jesus made about Himself were so convincing as to leave no doubt in their minds.

The first Gospel writer, Matthew, opens with the story of the virgin birth of Jesus. Matthew comments on this miraculous event with the quote from Isaiah 7:14, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:23). Matthew is making it clear that he understands that this child is God—“*God with us.*”

John is likewise explicit in the prologue to his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was

God . . . *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:1, 14).

Some of the disciples called Jesus *God* directly. When Thomas saw His wounds, he exclaimed, “*My Lord and my God!*” (John 20:28). Some view this as simply an expression of surprise. But such profane use of God’s name would have been unacceptable among the Jews of that day. Paul refers to Jesus in Titus 2:13 as “*our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” Peter likewise calls Him “*our God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:1).

The book of Hebrews is most emphatic that Jesus is God. Hebrews 1:8, applying Psalm 45:6 to Jesus Christ, states: “But to the Son He [the Father] says: ‘Your throne, *O God*, is forever and ever.’” Other parts of Hebrews explain that Jesus is higher than the angels (1:4-8, 13), superior to Moses (3:1-6) and greater than the high priests (4:14-5:10). He is greater than all these because *He is God*—along with the Father.

12:49-50; and again, see “In the Beginning Was the Word,” beginning on page 36). Moreover, in many passages in the Old Testament it can be difficult to distinguish between these two great personages, whereas the New Testament is usually clear in this respect.

Of course, since Jesus came to reveal the Father (Matthew 11:27), the logical conclusion is that the Father was not generally known by those in Old Testament times except for a few of the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets. King David, for example, is one who understood.

Quoted in part earlier, Hebrews 1:1-2 states: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”

In this opening passage of the book of Hebrews the clear implication is that the Father is the moving force behind the whole Old Testament. In context, verse 2 interprets verse 1. Though God the Father is the prime mover behind the Hebrew Bible, it is through Jesus Christ that He created the entire universe.

Also, the vital principle of the Bible interpreting the Bible helps us to understand the intent of Hebrews 1:1 in the light of other scriptures. Just as God made the worlds through the agency of the preexistent Word, Jesus Christ, and created all things by Him (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; John 1:3), so He has dealt with man through the same agency, Christ the Word.

## Jesus—both God and man

Jesus Christ today is the mediator between God the Father and man. But to perfectly fulfill that crucial role He had to have been both God and man. He was truly a man in every sense of that word or we have no salvation from our sins. The apostle Paul calls Him “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5), as does the apostle Peter (Acts 2:22).

Paul tells us that we should have the same humble, serving attitude of Jesus Christ, “who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped [i.e., tightly held on to], but *emptied Himself*, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness



*Scripture describes Jesus Christ existing as God with the Father before His human birth. The evening before His crucifixion, He prayed to be restored to the glory He had earlier shared with the Father—which came to pass after His resurrection.*



## “There Is One God, the Father ...and One Lord, Jesus Christ”

A number of scriptural passages identify Jesus Christ as God along with God the Father. Yet some contend that the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 8 denied the divinity of Christ in applying the distinction God exclusively to the Father. Let's consider what Paul was actually saying here—and what he wasn't.

In a discussion over whether Christians could eat meat sacrificed to idols, Paul agreed that idols were powerless and represented false gods, stating: “About eating food offered to idols, then, we know that ‘an idol is nothing in the world,’ and that ‘there is no God but one.’ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth—as there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him” (verses 4-6, HCSB).

So does the fact that “for us there is one God, the Father,” mean that Jesus cannot also be God? Initially it might seem so. But consider a parallel question based on the same passage: Does the fact that “for us there is . . . one Lord, Jesus Christ,” mean that the Father cannot also be Lord?

This is obviously not the case, for the Father is certainly Lord—meaning Master and Ruler. Jesus prayed, “I thank You, Father, *Lord of heaven and earth*” (Matthew 11:25). And Revelation 11:15 mentions the Kingdom “*of our Lord and of His Christ*.” Jesus is indeed Lord, but obviously the Father is Lord above Him. This does not contradict Paul's statement. And neither do other verses that proclaim the deity of Christ.

Rather than excluding Jesus from being God, a careful reading of 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 should help us to see that He is *included* in the divine identity. Paul is briefly affirming the contrast between pagan polytheism (the belief in many gods) and true monotheism (the belief in just one God). But why doesn't he limit his affirmation

that “there is no God but one” to stating only that “there is one God, the Father”? Why does he even mention “one Lord, Jesus Christ,” in this context?

Surely it is *because Jesus is an important part of what God is*. As elsewhere, Paul shows here that while “all things”—the entire created realm, both physical and spiritual—is ultimately *from* God the Father, it was all actually made *through* Jesus Christ. And Jesus rules over it all as Lord under the Father.

### Does “Lord” designate divinity?

Some maintain that of the terms “God” and “Lord” used here, only “God” designates divinity in context. It is true that the term *Lord* does not always denote deity. It can refer to any master—divine, human or otherwise. Yet we should note the parallelism in what Paul has written. He refers to the pagans’ “so-called gods” as both “many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords.’” Thus he includes the latter term “lords” as designating deity—whether the imaginary gods of the pagans or human rulers looked on as divine. In parallel, Paul refers to the true God as both “one God” and “one Lord.” So “Lord” in this context likewise designates divinity.

In fact, the passage here recognizes far more power and rule belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ than what the pagan systems attributed to their various gods. This point is vital to understanding the matter at hand. Paul acknowledges the label of “gods” for the pagan objects of worship, each believed to have a limited sphere of power. Yet he points out that Jesus, “*through whom are all things*,” is the Maker of all that exists, including ourselves!

By the very terminology Paul employs here, Jesus must rank as divine. For how can the imaginary Aphrodite or Venus, goddess of love appearing as the evening star, be classified as deity while Jesus, *Maker* of all the stars and of man and woman and of human love—having

greater power and lordship than that attributed to all of the pagan gods and goddesses combined—not be classified as deity?

With this in mind, some label Jesus as a god—but that would imply power over a limited sphere. Yet Jesus has dominion over *everything* that exists with the exception of only one thing—the Father, who is over Him. Jesus is thus subordinate to the Father, but the Father has entrusted “all authority” and “all things” to Him (Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:27-28). And as explained elsewhere, Jesus is in perfect and total agreement with the Father.

### Both crucial to defining God

So if both Father and Son are God and both are Lord, why does Paul divide Them out as “one God, the Father” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ”? We are not explicitly told, but the classification is used elsewhere in Scripture. In Psalm 110:1, Israel's King David referred to an intermediary between God and himself as Lord. The verse begins: “The LORD [*YHWH*] said to my Lord . . .” As the New Testament makes plain, *YHWH* (the Eternal God) in this case designates the Father, who is speaking to the One who became Jesus Christ, David's immediate Lord, ruling on the Father's behalf.

We also have Jesus' own prayer to the Father the night before His death, wherein He stated, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). Some regard this verse as likewise denying the divinity of Christ, but it assuredly does not. Besides the fact that Jesus said this while His power was limited in human flesh, when only the Father could act throughout the universe as God (John 5:30; 14:10), the obvious intent is that He was pointing to the Father as the true focus of our worship, with Himself as the Father's representative serving as intermediary.

This latter fact is evidently what Paul had in mind as well. In declaring the Father as the one God, he was referring to exclusivity of position, not exclusivity of divine nature. Just as Christ Himself did, Paul was acknowledging the Father

as the Supreme Being over all and the focus of our worship. While “all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father” (John 5:23), it should be evident that our honor of the Son is still relative to our honor of the Father. We honor the Son in this way because the Father has so ordained it. Thus, the Son is not the one God in the sense of the Supreme Being—and Paul therefore did not include Him in that designation.

But this does not exclude the Son from being God in the sense of sharing the same level of existence with the Father and sharing rule with the Father over all—and of acting as God on the Father's behalf throughout eternity, past and future. For the Son is in fact God in this very sense. Yet had Paul referred to Jesus as God in this particular context of denying polytheism and labeling the Father as the “one God,” it would likely have resulted in confusion for many. So he chose to use a different distinction, *Lord*—the same title Paul typically used for Jesus in his writings.

Designating Jesus as the “one Lord” stresses His role as the One who exercises God's rule over creation—the point being that the Father does not do so directly but acts through Jesus Christ. This fact is a crucial aspect of defining God. And particularly for us, just as David recognized, Jesus is our *immediate* Lord and Master—the Father being *ultimate* Lord and Master. But there is no division in allegiance, for devotion to Christ is *the way* we are devoted to the Father. So again, the fact that the Father is Lord does not contradict Jesus being the “one Lord.” For their lordship is not divided. Rather, the Father rules *through* the Son.

This then, in stark contrast to the competing deities of pagan polytheism, is Paul's brief explanation of true monotheism—God the Father, who is supreme, working through the Son, who perfectly carries out His will, these two being one in unity. And it is through Jesus that we worship and serve the Father. Thus, we should be able to see that Paul in 1 Corinthians 8 was not denying the deity of Christ but was, rather, affirming it through carefully chosen wording.



of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8, New American Standard Bible).

Jesus’ manhood was full and complete in the sense that He lived a life as a physical human being that ended in death. He became hungry and ate, grew tired and rested, and walked and talked just like any other human being. There was nothing in His physical appearance to distinguish Him from other Jewish men of His time (Isaiah 53:2).

The essential difference was in the realm of the spiritual. Jesus continually received needed spiritual power from the Father (compare John 5:30; 14:10). In fact, He possessed God’s Spirit from conception, actually being begotten in Mary’s womb through the Holy Spirit. Although tempted like every one of us, Jesus *never* transgressed God’s law. He never once sinned (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22).

One of the most insidious heresies in the 2,000-year history of Christianity is that Jesus Christ was *not* really a man—that He was *not* really tempted to sin. The apostle John condemned this teaching in the strongest terms (1 John 4:3; 2 John 7).

This heresy began in the first century and it persists even today, continuing to lead people away from the truth of God. We need to recognize that if Jesus had not really been human, then His sacrifice for our sins would be null and void.

### The Son of Man and the Son of God

Jesus Christ is called “the Son of Man” more than 80 times in the New Testament. It was the term He most commonly used in referring to Himself.

Christ repeatedly referred to Himself as the Son of Man in connection with His sufferings and sacrificial death for the sins of mankind (Matthew 17:22; 26:45; Mark 9:31; 14:41). Although of divine origin, He deliberately identified with our human plight—the sorrows and sufferings of the human race. The prophet Isaiah foresaw Him as “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3).

Sympathizing with our human frailties and difficulties, Jesus tells us: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

He also called Himself the Son of Man when referring to His role as the future Ruler of humanity in the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:28). He even used it when He described Himself as “the Lord of the Sabbath,” explaining how the seventh-day Sabbath should be observed with mercy and compassion (Mark 2:27-28; Matthew 12:8; Luke 6:5).

Then, when He came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I, *the Son of Man*, am?” (Matthew 16:13). They replied by recounting several commonly held but erroneous beliefs about Jesus’ identity. Simon Peter responded by saying, “You are the Christ [the Messiah], *the Son of the living God*” (verse 16).

Jesus observed that the Father Himself had revealed this wonderful truth to Peter (verse 17). And all of His apostles came to recognize the same truth, which is restated elsewhere in the New Testament (Matthew 14:33; John 20:31; Romans 1:3-4).

Indeed, while Jesus was human in the fullest sense, He was also more than simply human—for He was, in fact, the divine Son of God with all that name implies. Indeed, as we have seen, He was the Creator God come in the flesh. And after His human life was over, He returned to the divine glory He shared with the Father from eternity past (John 17:5). (To learn much more about who Jesus was and the events of His life, death and

### God’s Plan to “Bring Many Sons to Glory”

The Father and Jesus have, from the beginning, planned to increase Their kind. The “God kind” is a family! It is headed by the Father and now consists of the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:14-15 mentions “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom *the whole family* in heaven and earth is named.”

The Father and Jesus Christ existed from the beginning and always will exist. It is Their plan and desire to add to Their kind—“*bringing many sons to glory*” (Hebrews 2:10). Just as all life was made to reproduce after its own kind as stated throughout Genesis 1, so God patterned man after the God kind. This is the ultimate meaning of verse 26, where God says, “Let Us make man *in Our image, according to Our likeness*.”

This is a two-stage process. First, God made mankind physical, of the dust of the earth. Then, through conversion and faith in Christ and obedience to God’s spiritual law of love, each person becomes spiritually a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24). This leads to the final birth of new children into the divine family, who are then “like” Christ, Himself the *firstborn* Son of God

(Romans 8:29; Galatians 4:19; 1 John 3:2).

Indeed, just as human children are the same kind of beings as their parents (that is, *human* beings), so will God’s children be the same kind of beings as the Father and Christ (that is, *divine* beings). This is the awesome destiny of mankind! The God family will expand through God’s wonderful plan as revealed in His Word.

All children of this family—including Jesus Christ, who has always been with the One whom He revealed as “the Father” (John 1:18; Matthew 11:27)—will forever in the future willingly be under the ultimate sovereignty and leadership of the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28). Led by the Father and Jesus Christ, the members of this divine family will share a glorious and righteous future into eternity.

This, then, is the sense in which God is a family—indeed a *growing* family, presently comprising two divine Beings, the Father and Jesus Christ the firstborn, yet ultimately to be joined by a vast multitude of others.

For more details on God’s intention to make human beings part of His divine family, see the last chapter of this booklet.

resurrection, be sure to download or request our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* at [www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets).)

We see, then, that there is a plurality in God and that Jesus Christ is God along with the Father. While acknowledging that, the Trinity doctrine is wrong in presenting Them as persons in a single being along with the Holy Spirit.

## Jesus Christ's Submission to the Father

The apostle Paul, in Philippians 2, says that Jesus was willing to voluntarily surrender His awesome godly power and position for our sakes, telling us: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped [i.e., tightly held onto and not let go of], but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8, NIV).

After Jesus had been sacrificed for our sins and then restored to eternal life, He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high [that is, the Father]" (Hebrews 1:3). After He had directly experienced what it was like to be a flesh-and-blood human being, Christ returned to the Father's side—His previous station throughout all past eternity.

Remember His words just before His impending death and resurrection: "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, *with the glory which I had with You before the world was*" (John 17:5). In this passage Jesus talks of a time even before the creation account of Genesis 1:1, when these two divine Beings were together.

Of course, then and always, the Father is supreme. Christ's *equality* with the Father is in the sense of sharing the same level of existence, both of Them being God. It does not mean, as the Trinity doctrine holds, that the two are *equal in authority*—for Scripture clearly shows that Jesus is subordinate to the Father.

The Athanasian Creed, in use since the sixth century, states that "in this Trinity . . . none is

greater, or less than another." In fact, Trinitarian teaching denies any relationship of command and obedience between the divine persons—as this would imply individual wills and distinct beings and contradict the doctrine. Yet Scripture tells us that the Father gives commands that Christ perfectly and lovingly obeys (John 12:49-50; 14:31; 15:10). And Jesus distinguished between His own will and the Father's, yet submitted to the Father's will (Luke 22:42; John 5:30). Some see this as a temporary façade while Christ was in the flesh, yet His subordination to the Father persists today and will persist through the culmination of the ages.

The 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians is often rightly called the resurrection chapter. It tells us that everyone in God's future Kingdom will be subject to Christ, with the Father being the only exception: "It is evident that He [the Father] who put all things under Him [the Son] is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (verses 27-28).

Earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul clearly states that "the head of Christ is God" (11:3). In both of these passages Paul describes two individual divine Beings, with Jesus being subject to God the Father. This is consistent with Jesus Christ's own statements in which He said, contrary to the Athanasian Creed, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28) and "My Father . . . is greater than all" (John 10:29).

Directly from Scripture, we see that God the Father is the undisputed Head of the family—and that Father and Son are not coequal in authority, as claimed by the Trinity doctrine.

# How Is God One?

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there is only one God. As commonly translated, Jesus quotes Moses in saying, "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Mark 12:29; compare Deuteronomy 6:4). Paul tells us that "there is no other God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4) and that "there is one God" (1 Timothy 2:5).

The Bible also tells us that all other supposed gods are idols—figments of man's own imagination gone awry. Throughout history people have created many false gods. It is with this contrast in mind that we should approach Deuteronomy 6:4 as it is typically rendered—"the LORD is one." (For more on this wording, read "'The LORD Our God, the LORD Is One,'" beginning on page 46.)

Many do not fully comprehend how the Bible uses numbers. This factor contributes to considerable confusion and has led to misunderstandings such as the Trinity—belief that three persons are one divine being.

How, then, should we understand the oneness of God? In addition to the usual straightforward use of numbering, the concept of complete unity is associated with the Hebrew word *echad*, translated "one" in Deuteronomy 6:4 and other verses.

## How two become one

Let's go back to the first book of the Bible, Genesis. There, after the creation of Adam and Eve, we see the institution of the marriage relationship: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become *one flesh*" (Genesis 2:24). A couple becomes "one flesh" in a marital sexual union. But there is another important metaphorical meaning as well. Though two separate and distinct beings, in this context the two become one.

Some 4,000 years later Jesus reiterated this concept when He said, regarding marriage, that "'the two shall become one flesh'; *so then they are no longer two, but one flesh*. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:8-9). In marriage the two become one when joined in sexual union and in the covenant relationship they share. But they still remain *two* separate individuals, still one male *and* one female—joined together in marriage as one family unit.

Of course, this oneness is not complete or total. Yet in a physical sense an obvious oneness is reached when man and woman come together at the



moment of conceiving a child. As one science book put it: “Human life begins in . . . cooperation of the most intimate sort. The two cells wholly merge. They combine their genetic material. Two very different beings become one. The act of making a human being involves . . . cooperation so perfect that the partners’ separate identities vanish” (Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, 1992, p. 199).

The separate DNA substances of two distinct human beings combine

## “The LORD Our God, the LORD Is One”

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” This simple declaration by Moses in Deuteronomy 6:4, beginning what is now commonly referred to as the Shema (pronounced *sh’MAH*, Hebrew for “Hear”), has caused considerable consternation to many who try to understand who and what God is.

Reading here that God is one, most Jews for centuries have ruled out the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth could be the Son of God, on the same divine plane as God the Father.

Early Catholic theologians, reading the same verse, struggled to formulate in the doctrine of the Trinity a God consisting of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, with these being distinct persons yet at the same time a single triune God.

How, then, should we understand this verse?

One of the primary principles for understanding the Bible is that *we must consider all the scriptures on a subject*. Only then will we come to a complete and accurate understanding of the matter.

Other biblical passages clearly tell us that two distinct individuals, the Father and Jesus Christ the Son, are both God (Hebrews 1:8; John 1:1, 14). Therefore we should consider whether the Shema is commenting on the numerical oneness of God, or something else entirely.

### Multiple meanings of the Hebrew word translated “one”

Those who study the Hebrew language are challenged by the fact that Hebrew has a much more limited vocabulary compared to other languages such as English. What this means is that a single Hebrew word can and often does have multiple

meanings, making precise translation difficult.

A good example of this is the Hebrew word *echad*, translated “one” in Deuteronomy 6:4. Its meanings include the number *one*, but also such associated meanings as “one and the same,” “as one man, together [unified],” “each, every,” “one after another” and “first [in sequence or importance]” (Brown, Driver and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1951, p. 25). It can also be rendered “alone,” as the New Revised Standard Version translates it here (William Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1972, p. 9). As with many other Hebrew words, the exact meaning is best determined by context.

In this case, several interpretations could be both grammatically correct and consistent with other biblical statements.

In the Shema, Moses may have simply been telling the Israelites that the true God, their God, was to be *first*—the highest priority—in their hearts and minds. The young nation had risen from slavery in a culture in which the Egyptians believed in many gods, and they were poised to enter a land whose inhabitants were steeped in the worship of many supposed gods and goddesses of fertility, rain, war, journeys, etc. Through Moses, God sternly warned the Israelites of the dangers of abandoning Him to follow other gods.

This interpretation—that God is to be the Israelites’ first priority—has strong support in the context. In the very next verse Moses continues, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*”

This passage is at the heart of a several-

at conception to form a new, *unique* human being, one different from all other persons.

How wonderful are the things of God! How great are His purposes for the human family! Understanding marriage and the family helps us grasp important aspects of the Kingdom of God. (To learn more, be sure to download or request our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* at [www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets).)

chapters-long discussion of the benefits and blessings of wholeheartedly following God and avoiding the idolatrous practices of the people who were to be driven out of the Promised Land. Jesus Himself quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5 as the “first and great commandment” in the law (Matthew 22:36-38; Mark 12:28-30).

Another meaning of the Hebrew word *echad*, “alone,” fits this context as well. That is, the true God *alone* was to be Israel’s God; the Israelites were to have no other.

This may be how a scribe who heard Jesus quote the verse in Mark 12:29-30 understood it. The scribe responded in verse 32 (NRSV): “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one [Greek *heis*, which corresponds to *echad* in its multiple meanings], and *besides him there is no other*’”—which seems to indicate that this is what the scribe understood the word rendered “one” to mean in the expression (in essence, “alone”).

This would not rule out Jesus Christ from being God along with the Father. Rather, there is no other God apart from the true God—that is, outside the God family or God “kind” now consisting of two divine Beings, the Father and the Son. In short, the God family alone is God.

Another view of the Shema is based on the root word from which *echad* is derived—*achad*. This word means “to unify” or “go one way or other” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*). In other words, *echad* can also mean in unity or a group united as one.

### Instances where “one” can mean a group

In several verses *echad* clearly has the meaning of more than one person united as a group. In Genesis 11:6 God says of those building the tower of Babel, “Indeed the people are *one*

[*echad*] . . .” In Genesis 2:24 He says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become *one [echad]* flesh.”

When we read of a large group of people being one or a man and wife becoming one flesh in marital union, we understand that multiple individuals are involved. We do not assume that separate individuals, though united in spirit and purpose, have physically merged to become a single being.

God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are clearly of one mind and purpose. Jesus said of His mission, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” and “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 4:34; 5:30).

Describing Their relationship, Jesus said, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30). Christ prayed that His followers, both then and in the future, would be unified in mind and purpose just as He and the Father were. “I do not pray for these [disciples] alone,” He said, “but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; *that they all may be one*, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; *that they also may be one in Us*” (John 17:20-21). Further explanation of God’s oneness, in the sense of unity, may be found throughout this chapter of the booklet.

No matter which translation we accept—whether “The LORD our God, the LORD is first,” “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone,” or “The LORD our God, the LORD is one [in unity]”—none limits God to a singular being. And in light of these scriptures we’ve seen and others, it is clear that God is a plurality of beings—a plurality in unity. In other words, God the Father and Jesus the Son form a family perfectly united as one.

### There is one Church, but with many members

Continuing with our study of the biblical conception of what it means to be one, Paul wrote that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for *you are all one* in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). That is, these social distinctions would not divide God’s people. They were to be at one—in unity with each other.



*The Bible describes the Church as one body with many members. The divine family is similar—although one family, it has two members in transcendent glory, with more to be added according to God’s plan.*

Paul spent considerable effort to get this simple point across. He continues in verse 12, “For *as the body is one and has many members*, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.” Here Paul compares the Church to the human body.

Next he reminds us in principle of what he had earlier written in Galatians 3:28, which we just read, stating, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

The Church is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). So that we fully understand, Paul then repeats Himself by continuing in 1 Corinthians 12 to compare the Church to the human body, which likewise has many members performing different functions: “For in fact the [human] body is not one member, but many . . . But now indeed *there are many members, yet one body*” (verses 14, 20)—that is, there are many Church members but one Church.

Finally, in verse 27, he makes this basic point yet again: “Now you are the [one] body of Christ and *individually* [different] members of it” (verse 27, NRSV). In that sense the divine family is similar—one God and only one God, yet with Scripture revealing two individual glorious family members now constituting that one God, plus many more members yet

There is one Church, said Paul, but composed of many individual members possessing various spiritual gifts and talents. As he later explained to the Christians in the city of Corinth: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

to be glorified among mankind (Romans 8:29).

Paul also wrote in another context, as we’ve seen elsewhere, “For this reason I kneel before the Father, *from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name*” (Ephesians 3:14-15, NIV). Although there is only one family, there are many members. Truly converted Christians, led by God’s Spirit, are already counted as members of the family (Romans 8:14; 1 John 3:1-2), even though they have not yet received glorification and immortality in the resurrection to eternal life, which will take place at Christ’s return (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Elsewhere Paul tells us that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). We must be changed at the time of the resurrection (verses 51-54; Philippians 3:20-21). God will accomplish that in due course—provided we have overcome and developed righteous, godly character (Revelation 2:26; 3:21; 21:7-8).

### One Church, one God

In John 17 Jesus prayed to the Father, “And this is eternal life, that they [Christ’s disciples] may know You, *the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*” (verse 3). Jesus thus distinguishes between God the Father and Himself. They are not the same being. Nevertheless, They share perfect union and oneness. (For more on this verse and a parallel passage, see “There Is One God, the Father . . . and One Lord, Jesus Christ,” beginning on page 40.)

Continuing in this incredible prayer spoken shortly before His cruci-

## Seven Scriptures That Debunk the Trinity as a Single Being

The following seven scriptures show the fallacy of claiming that the Father and the Son are one being as the Trinity teaching asserts. How can one reconcile belief in the Trinity with these simple questions?

Hebrews 1:5 tells us that Jesus was begotten by His Father. Did He beget Himself?

In Matthew 22:44, the Father said Jesus would sit at His right hand until His enemies were made His footstool. Was Jesus to sit at His own right hand?

In Matthew 24:36, when Jesus told His disciples that no one knows the day or hour of His return but the Father only, did He really know but made up an excuse to not tell them?

In John 14:28, Jesus said His Father was greater than He was. Does this mean He was greater than Himself?

In John 17:1, Jesus prayed to His Father. Was He praying to Himself?

In Matthew 27:46, Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” Had He forsaken Himself?

In John 20:17, Jesus said He would ascend to the Father after His resurrection. Did He ascend to Himself?

These and many other biblical passages demonstrate to a rational Bible reader that the Trinity teaching is not only unbiblical, but also utterly illogical!



fixion, Christ said regarding His followers, “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that *they may be one, as we are one*” (verse 11, NRSV). Earlier He had said, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).

## Elohim: The Plurality of God

Throughout Scripture we come back to the reality that God has chosen to express His personal nature in terms of a family relationship. *Elohim* is the Hebrew word translated “God” in every passage of Genesis 1 as well as in more than 2,000 places throughout the Old Testament.

*Elohim* is a noun that is plural in form but normally singular in usage—that is, paired with singular verbs—when designating the true God. For a comparable modern expression, consider the term *United States*. This proper noun is plural in form but singular in usage. It is used with singular verbs. For example, Americans say, “The United States *is* going to take action,” not “The United States *are* going to take action.” The plural form does signify multiple individual states—but, taken collectively, they are viewed as one nation.

It is the same with *Elohim*. The word *Eloah*, meaning “Mighty One,” is the singular form. *Elohim*, meaning “Mighty Ones,” is plural. And, indeed, there are two Mighty Ones, the Most High and the Word. But, collectively, as *Elohim*, the two are seen as one God. *Elohim* said, “Let *Us* make man in our image, according to *Our* likeness” (verse 26).

We should note that since *Elohim* is used of the God family, each family member can be referred to by this word. (Some Bible writers also use the word *elohim* as a plural noun with plural usage to describe false gods. So one crucial factor in comprehending the meaning of this Hebrew word is determining what is intended by the context.)

When Adam and Eve made the momentous decision to disobey their Creator by eating of the fruit God had forbidden them to eat, the divine reaction was, “Behold, the man has become

like *one of Us*, to know good and evil” (Genesis 3:22). And God cut them off from the tree of life (verses 22-24).

The Hebrew word here translated “know” often means to learn or become aware of something through one’s personal experience. For Adam and Eve it was not enough to simply accept God’s command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They instead chose to step into God’s place and determine for themselves what was good and what was evil. The psalmist notes that the ungodly question God’s knowledge: “And they say, ‘How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?’” (Psalm 73:11).

The phrase “one of Us,” we should note, provides clear evidence that *more than one* constituted the “Us.” Moreover, to “become like one of Us” was actually our Creator’s original intention for all humanity, but it must be done *God’s* way and in *His* own time frame. That way is to submit ourselves to every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).

Only our Creator has the right and wisdom to determine what is good and evil for us. He knows what’s best for us and never wanted us to learn what is evil through experimentation. He tells us, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:7-8). He wants us to trust Him and His judgment.

Then He will follow through on His intention to make us like Him as part of the divine family in the way He has determined (see “God’s Plan to ‘Bring Many Sons to Glory’” on page 43).

You need to grasp this enormously important point: The Church is to be one *just as* God the Father and Jesus Christ are one. That’s quite a tall order! The various members should be unified with each other just as Christ and the Father are in perfect union. Although we have to realistically admit that this has rarely been the case in church history, God expects us to strive for that spiritual unity.

The members of the true Church of God are all to be joined together by the *Spirit* of God (1 Corinthians 12:13)—*living* by that Spirit. It is every individual’s responsibility to seek out the organized fellowship that best represents the biblical model and teaching of the New Testament Church. (For further understanding, download or request our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built* at [www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets).)

We see, then, that the Father and Jesus Christ are also one in the same sense that Jesus prayed for the Church to be one—not one single being, but multiple beings who are one in purpose, belief, direction, faith, spirit and attitude.

Consider the additional insight Jesus gives us in His prayer in John 17: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, *that they may be one just as We are one*: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one” (verses 20-23).

This spiritual oneness, this unity between and among all truly converted Christians, can be accomplished only through God working in them. Their unity should reflect the perfect unity—the oneness—of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.

Again, the Father and Christ are not a single entity but rather are one in the sense of being united or unified in perfect harmony.

## Another biblical example of oneness

Jesus Christ tells us we are to live “by every word of God” (Luke 4:4). Before any of the books of the New Testament were written, the Hebrew Scriptures—what we call the Old Testament—were the only recorded “word of God” available. Often the Old Testament can clear our foggy vision and help us understand the spiritual intent of the New. After all, we should understand that *all* the books of the Bible are the revealed Word of God, and “are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, [and] for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

Consider a seldom-read passage back in the book of Judges that illustrates how oneness can mean unity: “So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the



congregation gathered together *as one man* before the LORD at Mizpah” (Judges 20:1).

For once, the entire nation of Israel was wholly unified in purpose to meet a serious problem affecting the whole country. The expression “as one man” is used to convey the point that the nation was fully united at that particular time.

Verses 8 and 11 emphasize the point: “So all the people *arose as one man* . . . So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, *united together as one man*.” Of course, they still remained *many individual citizens* of the same nation. So again, the Bible itself sheds light on the meaning of oneness.

### Comprehending God’s oneness

We see, then, that Scripture reveals two separate, distinct persons, both spirit, yet one in unity, belief, direction and purpose—members of the same divine family. “I and My Father are one,” said Jesus (John 10:30).

When we understand what the Bible teaches, we see that there is only *one* God, just as there is only one human race—one extended family descended from Adam of nearly 7 billion individuals. The one divine family—the family of God—has multiple members, with all of humanity receiving the opportunity to become members of it along with the Father and Christ.

The traditional human family is a microcosm of that one great divine family (compare Romans 1:20). If we comprehend this marvelous, wondrous biblical principle, we should be reflecting our ultimate destiny in our marriages, other family relationships and everyday lives. We should strive to reflect the love and unity of the divine family—God the Father and His Son Jesus—in our human families.

Clearly, then, we must let the Bible interpret what it means in referring to the one God. God the Father and Jesus Christ, along with the Holy Spirit, are not one single being, as Trinitarian teaching maintains. Rather, the Father and Christ are distinct divine Beings who together are one God—the one God meaning the one God family that is one, united, in harmonized will and purpose. We consider the nature and role of the Holy Spirit in the next two chapters.

# Is the Holy Spirit a Person?

“*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, ‘says the LORD of hosts’*” (Zechariah 4:6).

In preceding chapters we saw that the teaching of the Trinity, asserting that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, was foreign to the writers of the Bible and originated several centuries after the New Testament was completed. How, then, does the Bible define the Holy Spirit if it is not a person?

The word “spirit” is translated from the Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma*, both words also denoting breath or wind, an invisible force. (The English “ghost” at one time had this meaning, which is why it’s used in older Bible translations.) Scripture says that “God *is* Spirit” (John 4:24). Yet we are also told that God *has* a Spirit—the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit.

So again, just what is the Holy Spirit?

### “The power of the Highest”

Rather than describing the Holy Spirit as a distinct person or entity, the Bible most often refers to it as and connects it with God’s divine *power* (Zechariah 4:6; Micah 3:8). Jewish scholars, examining the references to it in the Old Testament Scriptures, have never defined the Holy Spirit as anything but the *power* of God.

In the New Testament, Paul referred to it as the spirit of *power*, love and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Informing Mary that Jesus would be supernaturally conceived in her womb, an angel told her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you,” and the divine messenger described this Spirit to her as “the *power* of the Highest [which] will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35).

Jesus began His ministry “in the *power* of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14). He told His followers, “You shall receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Peter relates that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with *power*” (Acts 10:38). This was the same power that enabled Christ to perform many mighty miracles during His ministry. Likewise, Jesus worked through the apostle Paul “in mighty signs and wonders, by the *power* of the *Spirit of God*” (Romans 15:19).

Confronted with such scriptures, even the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*

admits: “The OT [Old Testament] *clearly does not envisage God’s spirit as a person . . . God’s spirit is simply God’s power*. If it is sometimes represented as being distinct from God, it is because the breath of Yahweh acts exteriorly . . . The majority of NT [New Testament] texts reveal God’s spirit as something, not someone; this is especially seen in the parallelism between the spirit and the power of God” (1965, Vol. 13, “Spirit of God,” pp. 574-576).

The reference work *A Catholic Dictionary* similarly acknowledges, “On the whole the New Testament, like the Old, *speaks of the spirit as a divine energy or power*” (William Addis and Thomas Arnold, 2004, “Trinity, Holy,” p. 827).

God’s Word shows that the Holy Spirit is the very nature, presence and expression of God’s power actively working in His servants (2 Peter 1:4; Galatians 2:20). Indeed, it is through His Spirit that God is present everywhere at once throughout the universe and affects it at will (Psalm 139:7-10).

Again and again the Scriptures depict the Holy Spirit as the *power* of God. Furthermore, it is also shown to be the mind of God and the very essence and life force through which the Father begets human beings as His spiritual children. The Holy Spirit is not God, but is rather a vital *aspect* of God—the agency through which the Father and Christ both work.

### Divine inspiration and life through the Spirit

In its article about the Holy Spirit, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* describes it as the “manifestation of divine presence and power perceptible especially in prophetic inspiration” (Vol. 3, 1992, p. 260).

Repeatedly the Scriptures reveal that God imparted divine inspiration to His prophets and servants through the Holy Spirit. Peter noted that “prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Peter 1:21).

Paul wrote that God’s plan for humanity had been “*revealed by the Spirit* to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:5) and that his own teachings were inspired by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13). Paul further explains that it is *through His Spirit* that God has revealed to true Christians the things He has prepared for those who love Him (verses 9-16). Working through the Spirit, God the Father is the revealer of truth to those who serve Him.

Jesus told His followers that the Holy Spirit, which the Father would send, “will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). It is through God’s Spirit within us that we gain spiritual insight and understanding. Indeed, we come to receive the very “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16)—also referred to as the “mind of the Spirit” (Romans 8:27).

Jesus had this spiritual comprehension in abundance. As the Messiah,

He was prophesied to have “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:2).

As the Son of Man on earth, Jesus portrayed in His personal conduct the divine attributes of Almighty God through completely living by His Father’s biblical standards through the power of the Holy Spirit (compare 1 Timothy 3:16).



*In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is represented by water, oil, a dove and fire. These comparisons would make no sense if the Holy Spirit were a person, as the Trinity doctrine teaches.*

Now returned to the spirit realm, Jesus wields the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit along with the Father. The Holy Spirit, we should understand, is not only the Spirit of God the Father, for the Bible also calls it the “Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9; Philippians 1:19). By either designation, it is the *same* Spirit,

as there is only one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:4).

The Father imparts the same Spirit to true Christians through Jesus Christ (John 14:26; 15:26; Titus 3:5-6), leading and enabling them to be His children and “partakers of the divine nature” (Romans 8:14; 2 Peter 1:4). God, who has eternal life in Himself, gives that life to others through the Spirit (John 5:26; 6:63; Romans 8:11).

### Impersonal attributes of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is spoken of in many ways that demonstrate that it is not a divine person. For example, it is referred to as a gift (Acts 10:45; 1 Timothy 4:14) that God gives without limit (John 3:34, NIV). We are told that the Holy Spirit can be quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19), that it can be poured out on people (Acts 2:17, 33), and that we are baptized with it (Matthew 3:11).

People can drink of it (John 7:37-39), partake of it (Hebrews 6:4) and be filled with it (Acts 2:4; Ephesians 5:18). The Holy Spirit also renews us (Titus 3:5) and must be stirred up within us (2 Timothy 1:6). These impersonal characteristics are certainly *not* attributes of a person or personal being!

The Spirit is also described by other designations—“the Holy Spirit of promise,” “the guarantee of our inheritance” and “the spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Ephesians 1:13-14, 17)—that show it is not a person.

In contrast to God the Father and Jesus Christ, who are consistently

compared to human beings in Their form and shape, the Holy Spirit is consistently represented, by various symbols and manifestations, in a completely different manner—such as breath (John 20:22), wind (Acts 2:2), fire (verse 3), water (John 4:14; 7:37-39), oil (Psalm 45:7; compare Acts 10:38; Matthew 25:1-10), a dove (Matthew 3:16) and an “earnest,” or down payment, on eternal life (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14, KJV).

To say the least, these depictions are difficult to understand if the Holy Spirit is a person!

## Does Matthew 28:19 Prove the Trinity?

Matthew 28:19 is a biblical passage sometimes misunderstood with regard to the Trinity doctrine. Jesus is quoted as telling His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in [‘into,’ Greek *eis*] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Remember the important principle that the Bible interprets the Bible. What this particular passage shows us is that the process of baptism and entering God’s family *involves* the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is *not* a description of the *nature* of God.

Notice Acts 2:38: “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” After real repentance and being baptized, the example from Scripture is that a minister lays his hands on the repentant person and he or she receives the Holy Spirit directly from God (Acts 8:14-17).

Important as it is, baptism alone is not sufficient. We must receive God’s Holy Spirit—the seed of eternal life—which is imparted by the biblically mandated laying on of hands of one of God’s ministers (Acts 19:1-6). We cannot partake of God’s nature, as mentioned in 2 Peter 1:4, without first being begotten of the Father by the Holy Spirit, which imparts that divine nature.

Why are Father, Son and Holy Spirit mentioned in Matthew 28:19? Let us understand. At baptism we enter into a covenant relationship with God the Father. The sacrifice of Jesus

Christ, the Son of God, makes that covenant relationship possible. (Of course, through our repentance and baptism we also enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ as our older Brother and head of the Church.) The Holy Spirit is the means by which the Father and Son make all of this possible.

On another level, God the Father is the One who calls us to baptism and a new way of life (John 6:44, 65), and it is His goodness that leads us to repentance and baptism (Romans 2:4). We know also that Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice for our sins, reconciling us to God (Romans 5:6-11)—baptism picturing our burial with Jesus Christ and our being raised to a new life with Him both now and in the future resurrection (Romans 6:1-5). And God’s Holy Spirit, as we will see more in a later chapter, is what makes us God’s begotten children (Romans 8:16).

The instruction in Matthew 28:19 presumes that, before being baptized, believers will learn of God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. At baptism, these believers enter *into* a personal family relationship with God the Father and the Son *through* the Holy Spirit, thereby receiving the *name* of God (compare Ephesians 3:14-15).

Note again that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all acknowledged as being involved in this process. But that does not mean all three are divine persons in a Trinity. To claim that Matthew 28:19 establishes one God in three persons goes far beyond the actual words of the verse. And other verses show such a notion to be utterly false.

In Matthew 1:20 we find further proof that the Holy Spirit is not a distinct entity, but God’s divine power. Here we read that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus continually prayed to and addressed God the Father as His Father and *not* the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:32-33; 11:25-27; 12:50). He *never* represented the Holy Spirit as His Father! Clearly, the Holy Spirit was the *agency or power* through which the Father begot Jesus as His Son—not a separate person or being altogether.

## Paul’s example and teaching were in line with Christ’s

If God were a Trinity, surely Paul, who was taught directly by the resurrected Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12) and who wrote much of the theological underpinnings of the early Church, would have comprehended and taught this concept. Yet we find no such teaching in His writings.

Moreover, Paul’s standard greeting in his letter to the churches, as well as individuals to whom he wrote, consistently mentions “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Yet in each of his greetings he *never* mentions the Holy Spirit! (The same can also be said of Peter in the salutations of both his epistles.)

The same greeting, with only minor variations, appears in every epistle that bears Paul’s name. Notice how consistent he is in *not including the Holy Spirit* in his greetings:

- “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7).
- “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:3).
- “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:2).
- “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:3).
- “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 1:2).
- “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2).
- “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Colossians 1:2).
- “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:1).
- “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:1-2).
- “Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Timothy 1:2).



• “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (2 Timothy 1:2).

• “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 1:4).

• “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philemon 3).

The Holy Spirit is *always* left out of these greetings—an unbelievable and inexplicable oversight if the Spirit were indeed a person or entity coequal with God the Father and Christ!

This is even more surprising when we consider that the congregations to which Paul wrote had many gentile members from polytheistic backgrounds who had formerly worshipped numerous gods. Paul’s epistles record no attempt on his part to explain the Trinity or Holy Spirit as a divine person equal with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

In all of Paul’s writings, only in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is the Holy Spirit

## Why the Holy Spirit Is Sometimes Incorrectly Referred to as “He” and “Him”

Many people assume that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, like the Father and Jesus Christ, based on references to the Spirit as “he,” “him” and “himself” in the New Testament. This confusion arises from two factors—the use of gender-inflected pronouns in the Greek language (a difficult concept to understand for those who speak only English) and bias on the part of some translators.

Greek, like the Romance languages deriving from Latin (Spanish, French, Italian, etc.), assigns a specific gender for every noun. Every object, animate or inanimate, is designated as either masculine, feminine or neuter. The gender is often unrelated to whether the item is indeed masculine or feminine.

For example, in French the word *livre*, meaning “book,” is of the masculine gender and is referred to by a pronoun equivalent to the English “he” or “him.” And in Spanish, *mesa*, or “table,” is in the feminine. Clearly, although these nouns have gender, their gender does not refer to *actually being* male or female. In the English language, in contrast, most nouns that do not refer to objects that are male or female are referred to in the

neuter sense, with the pronoun “it.”

We might note that in the Hebrew language, in which the Old Testament was written, the word translated “spirit,” *ruach*, is referred to with *feminine* pronouns. But the Holy Spirit clearly is not female or a woman.

In Greek, both *masculine* and *neuter* words are used to refer to the Holy Spirit. The Greek word translated “Counselor,” “Helper,” “Comforter” and “Advocate” in John chapters 14 to 16 is *parakletos*, a masculine word in Greek and thus referred to in these chapters by Greek pronouns equivalent to the English “he,” “him,” “his,” “himself,” “who” and “whom.”

Because of the masculine gender of *parakletos*, these pronouns are grammatically correct in Greek. But to translate these into *English* as “he,” “him,” etc., is grammatically *incorrect*.

For example, you would never translate a particular French sentence into English as “I’m looking for my book so I can read him.” While this grammatical construction makes sense in the French language, it is *wrong* in English. In the same way, to suppose on this basis that the

mentioned along with the Father and Jesus Christ in such expressions, and there only in connection with the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (NIV) in which believers share—not in any sort of theological statement on the nature of God. The point Paul makes here is that God’s Spirit is the unifying agent that brings us together in godly, righteous fellowship, not only with one another but with the Father and Son.

Yet here, too, God’s Spirit is not spoken of *as a person*. Notice that Paul writes that our fellowship is *of* the Holy Spirit, not *with* the Holy Spirit. As 1 John 1:3 tells us, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”—the Holy Spirit is not mentioned.

(For other verses that supposedly support the existence of the Trinity, see “What About Passages that ‘Prove’ the Trinity?” starting on page 62.)

Jesus likewise *never* spoke of the Holy Spirit as a divine third person. Instead, in numerous passages He spoke only of the relationship between God the Father and Himself (Matthew 26:39; Mark 13:32; 15:34; John

Holy Spirit is a person to be referred to as “he” or “him” is incorrect.

Only if the *parakletos* or helper were *known* to be a person could the use of a gender-inflected pronoun justifiably be used in English. And the term *parakletos* certainly *can* refer to a person—as it refers to Jesus Christ in 1 John 2:1. Yet the Holy Spirit is nowhere designated with personhood. So personal pronouns should not be substituted for it.

Furthermore, there is absolutely *no* theological or biblical justification for referring to the term “Holy Spirit” with masculine pronouns, even in Greek. The Greek word *pneuma*, translated “spirit” (but also translated “wind” and “breath” in the New Testament) is a grammatically *neuter* word. So, in the Greek language, pronouns equivalent to the English “it,” “its,” “itself,” “which” or “that” are properly used in referring to this word translated into English as “spirit.”

Yet when the King James or Authorized Version was produced (early in the 1600s), the doctrine of the Trinity had already been accepted for more than 1,000 years. So naturally the translators of that version, influenced by that belief, usually chose personal rather than neutral pronouns when referring to the Holy Spirit in English (see, for example, John 16:13-14; Romans 8:26).

However, this wasn’t always the case. Notice that in some passages in the King James Version the translators *did* use the proper neuter pronouns. For example, Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit *itself* [not *himself*] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” Similarly, Romans 8:26 says “the Spirit *itself* [again, not *himself*] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” In these cases the translators correctly used neuter pronouns because the Greek word *pneuma*, translated “Spirit,” is neuter in gender.

Another example is Matthew 10:20, where Jesus says: “For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father *which* [not *who*] speaketh in you.” Another is 1 Peter 1:11, which refers to “the Spirit of Christ *which* [again, not *who*] was in them.” The King James Version translators did use the proper neuter pronouns in these verses.

Regrettably, later English translators of the Bible have gone further than the King James translators in referring to the Holy Spirit with masculine rather than neuter pronouns. Thus the Holy Spirit is almost always referred to as “he” or “him” in the more modern versions. This reflects *not* linguistic accuracy, but the doctrinal bias or incorrect assumptions of Bible translators who wrongly believe the Holy Spirit is a person.

5:18, 22; etc.). The Holy Spirit as a person is conspicuously absent from Christ's teaching in general. Of particular interest in this regard are His many statements about Himself and the Father, especially when He *never* makes similar statements about Himself and the Holy Spirit.

### The Holy Spirit is absent in visions of God's throne

We should also consider that, in visions of God's throne recorded in the Bible, although the Father and Christ are seen, the Holy Spirit as a third person is *completely absent*.

In Acts 7:55-56, which describes the martyrdom of Stephen, we read that he "gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!'" *He saw God the Father and Jesus the Son, but no Holy Spirit.*

Daniel 7:9-14 similarly describes Daniel's vision of heaven. There he saw "the Ancient of Days"—God the Father in this context—plus millions of angelic beings and "One like the Son of Man," the preexistent Jesus Christ. Again, *he saw no third person of a Holy Trinity.*

And in Revelation 4-5 and 7:10 we see that Jesus, the Lamb of God, is mentioned as being at the right hand of God the Father, but no one is mentioned as being at the Father's left hand. Nowhere is the Holy Spirit mentioned as a being or person. Nowhere in any of these passages, or anywhere in Scripture, *are three divine persons pictured together.*

In the final book of the Bible (and the last to be written), the Holy Spirit as a divine person is completely absent from its pages. The book describes "a new heaven and new earth" (Revelation 21:1) wherein "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them" (verse 3). Christ the Lamb is also present (verse 22). The Holy Spirit as a distinct person, however, *is again absent*—another inexplicable oversight if this Spirit is the third person of a triune God.

This is why Paul states in 1 Corinthians 8:6 that "there is one God, the Father . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ," without mentioning the Holy Spirit as a divine person. He elsewhere refers to "the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ" (Colossians 2:2)—mentioning only the two as God, *again not including the Holy Spirit.*

We should also consider that nowhere do we find any prayer, psalm or hymn addressed to or dedicated to the Holy Spirit. Nowhere do we see the Holy Spirit worshipped. Again and again, the biblical record just doesn't support the Trinity doctrine in places where it should be obvious if it were true!

This is why, as we saw in numerous quotes earlier in this booklet, so many historians and biblical researchers admit that the doctrine of the Trinity is not found in the Bible. We must not cling to long-held religious traditions if they

contradict the Scriptures! Our beliefs must rest solidly on the teachings of the Holy Bible. Jesus said, "[God's] word is truth" (John 17:17).

### What about scriptures describing actions of the Holy Spirit?

Some scriptural passages seem to describe the Holy Spirit as appar-



*Many believe the Holy Spirit is a distinct person because the Bible sometimes speaks of it in ways that seem to describe personal actions. But this proves nothing, as Scripture personifies mountains as singing, rivers as clapping their hands, the skies and rain as praising God, and trees as talking. Clearly none of these are persons—just as the Holy Spirit is not a person, either.*

While at first this might seem to indicate as much, it doesn't really prove that at all. In the languages of Bible times, nonpersonal things were sometimes described in personal ways and as having personlike activities.

For example, in Genesis 4:10 God says to Cain: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground." Here Abel's shed blood is described as having a "voice" that "cries out" from the ground. Yet clearly this is figurative language, as blood has no voice and cannot speak.

Similarly, in the book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified as calling aloud and crying out (Proverbs 1:20-21). Proverbs 8 describes wisdom as crying out, standing on a high hill, calling to men, speaking, having lips and a mouth, loving and being loved, having children and having accompanied and rejoiced with God. Yet obviously wisdom is not a person and does none of these things in a literal sense!

Likewise, Psalm 65:13 describes valleys shouting for joy and singing. Psalm 96:11-12 attributes emotions to the heavens, earth and fields. Psalm 98:8 says the rivers clap their hands. Psalm 148:4-5 describes the skies and rain praising God.

Isaiah 3:26 says the gates of the city of Jerusalem will lament and mourn. Isaiah 14:8 speaks of cypress trees rejoicing and cedar trees talking. Isaiah 35:1 ascribes emotions to the wilderness and says the desert will rejoice. Isaiah 44:23 and 49:13 describe mountains, forests, trees and the heavens singing.

Isaiah 55:12 says that hills will break into singing and trees will clap their hands. In Habakkuk 2:11 stones and timbers are described as talking to each other.



We find similar personifications of nonpersonal things in the New Testament as well. Matthew 11:19 speaks of wisdom having children. Romans 6 says that sin enslaves and reigns over human beings (verses 6, 12, 16). In

## What About Passages That “Prove” the Trinity?

Some people, seeking to buttress their belief in the Trinity, point to a number of biblical passages that supposedly show Father, Son and Holy Spirit operating together as a Trinity. But do these passages really show that? We must be sure to read exactly what these verses *do* say and what they *don't* say, and not read into them our own mistaken assumptions.

The Trinity doctrine assumes that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three coequal persons in one divine being. Yet, as we have seen from many quotes from Bible scholars and researchers earlier in this booklet, no biblical passage states any such thing.

So what about verses “proving” the Trinity? Those that are typically cited merely show *the operation or involvement* of Father, Son and Spirit in some aspect of Christian experience. But this proves nothing with regard to the *supposed personhood* of the Holy Spirit or whether Father, Son and Spirit are *one being*. All that can be shown from such examples is that the three exist and that they are in some particular manner involved in whatever is being described—obvious points that are beyond dispute.

As this booklet shows, the testimony of numerous scriptures makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is not a person but is, rather, the power of God through which the Father and Son, who are individual personal Beings within the one God family, both act. Both the Father and Christ are intimately involved in the process of human salvation—and They use Their Spirit in this process. So, quite apart from any acceptance of the Trinity, we should expect that God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit would be mentioned together in various contexts.

With that in mind, let's note some verses commonly used to substantiate the Trinity. The princi-

pal one people turn to is **Matthew 28:19** about baptizing into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The meaning of this verse is explained in “Does Matthew 28:19 Prove the Trinity?” on page 56. Another verse, **2 Corinthians 13:14**, about having fellowship of the Holy Spirit, is explained on page 59. As shown, neither passage reveals a triune Godhead.

Let's consider more such examples that are used to support belief in a Trinity:

**Matthew 3:16-17:** “When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” A supposed indication of threeness: The Son is baptized, the Spirit descends onto Him and the Father issues a declaration from heaven. Yet there is no hint of three persons in one being, as the Trinity doctrine asserts, and the Spirit is not revealed or represented as a person.

• **Romans 15:30:** “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me.” Again, we only see that Jesus, the Spirit and God the Father *exist*—not that they form a triune being. “The love of the Spirit” is the love that comes *from* the Spirit—love, a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), being poured into human hearts through means of the Spirit (Romans 5:5). This says nothing of the Spirit exhibiting personhood.

• **Galatians 4:6:** “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” The Holy Spirit through which Christ became and lived as the Father's Son is given by the Father to believers that

Romans 10:6 righteousness is described as speaking. In 1 John 5:8 water and blood are said to testify and agree.

*Yet clearly none of these things happen literally.* At times the Bible

they also might become His sons. Again, there's no three in one or the Holy Spirit as a person here. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* leaps far afield in stating of this verse: “Paul now adds Trinitarian teaching, for he is telling us that salvation consists in its fullness of acts by God the Father in sending both God the Son and God the Holy Spirit” (James Boice, Vol. 10, 1976, p. 473). This is utter fiction, as nothing remotely like this is actually stated in this passage or surrounding verses. In fact, rather than Trinitarian exclusivity, this verse shows God expanding divine sonship beyond Jesus the Son.

• **Ephesians 2:18:** “For through Him [Christ] we both [Jews and gentiles] have access by one Spirit to the Father.” *Expositor's* states regarding this verse that if access through the Holy Spirit is meant, which it surely is, “then the trinitarian implications of this verse are obvious” (Skevington Wood, Vol. 11, 1978, p. 41). Yet are they? The fact is, there is no three-in-one Trinity here at all. All we see is that through Christ we are linked by the same Spirit to the Father. The Spirit is a connective medium in this context, not a person.

• **1 Peter 1:2:** “[Believers are] elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” This verse begins with Christians being chosen through the Father's advance determination and ends with forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice. The middle of the verse says we are sanctified—meaning “set apart”—through means of the Holy Spirit. This says nothing about personhood of the Spirit. Setting apart can be accomplished in various ways, such as by an inanimate seal or dividing line. Yet the setting apart in this context concerns being made right before God, which includes His Spirit empowering us to wholeheartedly obey Him. Still, this does not require that the Holy Spirit be a person—only a source of power from God, which, as we will see documented in the next chapter, it assuredly is. Again, Father, Son and Holy Spirit work in concert

in a Christian's life—but this implies no Trinitarian doctrine.

• **1 Peter 3:18:** “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.” Jesus died to reconcile us to God the Father and, since His resurrection, He still leads us to the Father. Jesus' resurrection was accomplished by the power of God's Spirit. Again, no personhood is implied here. The Spirit was simply the power and the means, for it was “God the Father who raised Him from the dead” (Galatians 1:1).

What do these various examples and others have in common? *None delineate, define, explain or prove the Trinity as they are purported to.* They do all show the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as existing and important to Christian life. But none present the Spirit as a person or the Father, Son and Spirit as a triune God. Indeed, such examples don't substantiate the Trinity in any way.

For some useful levity here, let's consider a couple of modern-life parallels to show this even more plainly.

A dentist instructs his dental hygienist to polish a patient's tooth with a rotary instrument. Therefore, the dentist, hygienist and rotary instrument form a trinity of three persons in one being—the rotary tool that did the work of polishing being obviously a person. Does that follow?

Or how about: A fireman hooked up a hose to a fire hydrant, took aim with the hose and put out a fire. Therefore, the hydrant, hose and fireman form a trinity of three persons in one being. Since all worked to put out the fire, it is clear that all three are persons. Really?

Hopefully you see the point. These examples no more prove a trinity of three persons than the various Bible verses used. Again, let's be clear on what such Bible verses actually *do* say and on what they certainly *don't* say—and not fall for what are actually weak and illogical arguments.



similarly applies such figurative language to the Holy Spirit, ascribing activity to it as though it were a person. Yet, as noted earlier in this chapter, the Bible also describes the Holy Spirit in ways that clearly show it is *not* a person.

As even the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, quoted from earlier, acknowledges: “The majority of New Testament texts reveal God’s spirit as *something*, not *someone*; this is especially seen in the parallelism between the spirit and the power of God. When a quasi-personal activity is ascribed to God’s spirit, e.g., speaking, hindering, desiring, dwelling (Acts 8:29; 16:7; Rom[ans] 8:9), *one is not justified in concluding immediately that in these passages God’s spirit is regarded as a Person; the same expressions are used also in regard to rhetorically personified things or abstract ideas . . .*”

“In Acts, the use of the words ‘Holy Spirit,’ with or without an article, is rich and abundant. However, again, *it is difficult to demonstrate personality from the texts*” (2003, Vol. 13, “Spirit, Holy,” p. 428).

Thus we see that in some cases where the Holy Spirit is described in a personal activity, we should understand this as God using the Holy Spirit as the *power* or *agency* through which He acts.

Consider, for example, that if a man’s hand takes hold of a book and lifts it, we can say the man lifted the book. This does not make the hand a separate person. Nor does it mean that the hand is the man. The hand is merely part of, or an extension of, the man. And it is the agency through which the man is acting. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is the agency through which God—Father or Son or both—acts.

Of course, the Holy Spirit is far more than a hand. It is the very power, mind and life essence of God—pervading infinity so that by it God, as Psalm 139:7-10 and Jeremiah 23:23-24 show us, is omnipresent.

This is why Peter in Acts 5:1-10 said that Ananias and Sapphira “lie[d] to the Holy Spirit” and also that they “lied . . . to God.” This passage doesn’t indicate that the Holy Spirit is God or one of the supposed three persons of God, as some read into this passage, but rather that the Holy Spirit, being the omnipresent agency through which God acts, *is how God heard the lie*.

Jesus Christ’s reference in John 16:7 to the Holy Spirit as a “Helper” (or “Counselor,” “Comforter” or “Advocate” as some versions translate it) is a personification that provides a good analogy of part of the Spirit’s function in the lives of true Christians. And as noted before, many passages show the Spirit as the *power* of God to help and assist us, not a distinct person as Trinitarians maintain.

But what does the Spirit do? What is its function and purpose? In the next chapter we’ll examine how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians.

# The Holy Spirit: God’s Transforming Power

*“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).*

One of the major problems with the Trinity doctrine is that it clouds our understanding of the crucial role of God’s Spirit as the *power* of God—particularly in the life of a Christian. We must put away false beliefs if we are to come to a correct understanding of the marvelous truth of what the Bible reveals about the Holy Spirit.

God’s Spirit, as we’ve seen, is described by an angel as “the *power* of the Highest” (Luke 1:35). This is the power that made and sustains the universe. And it is the same power *we* can receive directly from God!

Many other scriptures show this connection between the Holy Spirit and God’s power. For example, Paul, we’ve seen as well, reminded Timothy that “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of *power* and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). Other scriptures also refer to the Holy Spirit as the *power of God* (Zechariah 4:6; Micah 3:8).

Luke 4:14 records that Jesus Christ began His ministry “in the *power* of the Spirit.” Speaking of the Holy Spirit, which would be given to His followers after His death, Jesus told them, “You shall receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Peter relates that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with *power*; [and Jesus] went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

The Holy Spirit is here associated with the *power* by which God the Father was with Jesus—the power through which He performed mighty miracles during His earthly, physical ministry. The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God’s power actively working in His servants (Psalms 51:11; 139:7).

Paul expresses his desire that fellow Christians would “abound in hope by the *power* of the Holy Spirit,” in the same way that Jesus had worked through him “in mighty signs and wonders, by the *power* of the Spirit of God” (Romans 15:13, 19).

This Spirit empowers Christians to live a life of growing and overcoming,

of transforming their lives to become like Jesus Christ!

### We need God's divine help!

None of us can overcome our sins and shortcomings and fully obey God without His divine help. Even if we could by our own will alter our actions, only God can change our hearts.

This is why Paul appealed to members of the church in Rome not to be “conformed to this world, but [to] be *transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:1-2) through the power of God's Spirit. That Spirit is the power God uses to transform our lives and renew our minds!

Earlier in this epistle, in chapter 8, Paul helps us understand how the Holy Spirit works in the life of a Christian. In verse 14 he writes that “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Here we see that, to be considered God's children, we must be *led by* the Spirit of God.

Paul continues this same thought in verse 9, dogmatically stating that if you do not have God's Spirit, also referred to here as *Christ's Spirit*, dwelling in you, you are “*not His*.” This is why it is vital that we repent and be baptized—so we can surrender our lives to God and receive the gift of His Spirit to work in and transform our lives!

Paul elsewhere writes that you have “Christ in you” if you are a Christian (Colossians 1:27). It is through the power and influence of God's Spirit that we allow Christ to live in us.

After he had received God's Spirit, Paul described his new outlook



*Scripture describes the Holy Spirit primarily as the power of God—the power by which Jesus Christ and the apostles performed great miracles such as healing the sick and restoring sight to the blind.*

emulating His Son. Paul urged other believers, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). He tells us, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5, NRSV).

on life: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, *but Christ liveth in me*: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, KJV).

Symbolically buried with Jesus in the watery grave of baptism, Paul now lived a life that was no longer his own. He described his transformed life as one of allowing Christ to *live again within him*. This is how we please God—by

However, we cannot succeed at living a converted life of obedience to God and becoming like Jesus Christ strictly through our own efforts. We succeed through *God's* power and help rather than through our own efforts. Therefore, the glory and credit go to God.

To imitate Christ we must ask God for help, through His Spirit, so we can humbly obey God and bring our thoughts, attitudes and actions in line with His. We must allow His Spirit to become the guiding force in our lives to produce the qualities of true Christianity. We must regularly ask ourselves whether we are truly being *led by* God's Spirit or are *resisting* it.



### We receive divine help through God's Spirit

What does God's Holy Spirit do for us as Christians? This question affects the core of our religious beliefs, because without the power of God's Spirit we can have no deep, close relationship with the Father, nor can we become His children. It is because the Spirit dwells in us that we are called the children of God (Romans 8:14-17).

We must understand what it means to be “led by the Spirit.” God's Spirit doesn't drive, drag or push us around; it *leads* us. It will not prevent us from sinning, nor will it force us to do what is right. It leads us, but *we must be willing to follow*.

How does God's Spirit lead us? Let's consider a few ways.

- *The Holy Spirit keeps us in contact with God's mind.* God's Spirit works with our mind. The apostle John describes it this way: “Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit [which] He has given us” (1 John 3:24). Through God's Spirit, which He gives us, we can be influenced by Him for the good and obey God's commandments. This is in stark contrast to the world around us and our own nature, which influence us toward evil.

God's Spirit also helps us come to a deeper comprehension of His truth. When Jesus promised the apostles He would send the Spirit to them, He said it would “guide [them] into all truth” (John 16:13).

- *God's Spirit inspires a deeper understanding of His Word, purpose and will.* As 1 Corinthians 2:9-11 tells us: “But as it is written, ‘Eye has

*Scripture teaches that we must repent—turn from our own selfish, self-centered ways—and be baptized to receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit, which enables us to live a new life of obedience to God.*

not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us *through His Spirit*. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except [by] the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except [by] the Spirit of God.”

Without God’s Spirit a person cannot understand God’s divinely expressed Word and will, “for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (verse 14).

• *The Holy Spirit makes overcoming possible*. Nothing is too difficult

## How to Stir Up God’s Spirit

**T**he apostle Paul admonished members in one of the churches he started, “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). He also urged the young evangelist Timothy: “Stir up [rekindle into flame] the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

Paul likened God’s Spirit to an ember in a dying fire. He encouraged Timothy to stir up that live coal, to fan it into flames. This is an important lesson for all of us. Paul knew that we must guard against neglecting the gift of God’s Spirit and letting it grow cold!

How can we maintain the courage, strength and love God gives us through His Spirit? We find the answers in several scriptures.

Paul tells us, “Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day” (Ephesians 6:13). Satan will do all in his power to discourage us, to induce us to become disillusioned and afraid—to abandon our confidence in God. What, then, did Paul mean by putting on “the whole armor of God” as our defense? What may we use to resist such self-defeating attitudes as fear, apathy and discouragement?

Paul continues: “Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be

able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of [the hope of] salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (verses 14-17, NRSV; compare 1 Thessalonians 5:8).

Paul tells us we need to stand fast in the truth we have learned, concentrating on living righteously regardless of circumstances. We also must be active in doing our part in furthering the spread of the true gospel, never losing sight of eternal life as our goal and using God’s Word as the sword that cuts through all deception.

But equally important is what Paul mentions next in Ephesians 6: “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should” (verses 18-20, NIV).

Our ability to remain spiritually strong and active depends on how much we rely on God. And our line of communication for that help is through prayer.

Paul encouraged Christians to make it their practice to pray not only for themselves but also for him and for others. “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the

for us with the power of God working in our lives. Romans 8:26 tells us that God’s Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. Paul, who wrote the letter to the Romans, speaks for all of us when he said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Jesus promises Christians, “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27). The Christian life is to be one of *overcoming*. We must realize God doesn’t want us to remain just as we were when He called us. Instead, as we earlier read, we must “not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). Christianity is a lifetime of *overcoming* and *growing*—of transforming our

mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Colossians 4:2-4).

One of the main keys to keeping the working of God’s Spirit active and stirred up in our lives is keeping our minds on the big picture of what God is doing. If we dwell excessively on ourselves and our own problems we become far more vulnerable to Satan’s negative influences. Paul urged all new converts to see themselves as part of a great work that God is doing. As the point man for the work of God in their region of the world, he encouraged them to enthusiastically support his efforts through their prayers.

He explains why their prayers were so important: “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered . . . But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers” (2 Corinthians 1:8-11, NIV).

Paul mentions his deep love for those converted under his ministry. “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:3-6, NIV).

It is important that we also keep our confidence in God alive and active. Sometimes we need to combine fasting with our prayers to stir

up zeal and renew our dedication and commitment to Him. King David wrote that he “humbled [him]self with fasting” (Psalm 35:13). Fasting is abstaining from food and drink as a means of getting our minds back on the reality that we are not self-sufficient. Fasting helps us realize just how fragile we are and how much we depend on things beyond ourselves. And it’s an exercise in denying ourselves for God’s higher purposes.

The Bible records that great men of faith such as Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Paul and Jesus Himself fasted to draw closer to God (Exodus 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Daniel 9:3; 10:2-3; 2 Corinthians 11:27; Matthew 4:2).

Jesus was approached with the question, “Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” He responded: “Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days” (Mark 2:18-20).

Jesus knew that His true disciples, once He was no longer there in the flesh with them, at times would need to fast to regain and renew their zeal to serve Him. They would need to “stir up” the gift of the Holy Spirit within them.

James tells us, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8). Through constant prayer and occasional fasting we can do this. We can make it our practice to stir up and rekindle the Spirit of God within us!



thoughts and mind to become like Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5).

• *The Spirit of God convicts our conscience and helps us see sin as it really is.* In speaking of the Holy Spirit, which would be given to His followers after His death and resurrection, Jesus said it would “convict the world of sin” (John 16:8). God’s Spirit within us, working with our conscience, helps us to recognize and avoid sin. The guilt we feel is real when prompted by recognition of sins.

• *The Holy Spirit produces godly fruit in us.* Just as an apple tree produces apples, God’s Spirit produces a particular type of fruit in the life of a Christian. Paul lists the fruit that should be evident in those who are led by

## God’s Nature and Character

In any discussion about who and what God is, we must not lose sight of the most important truth about God—that God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are Beings of *infinite love*. John perfectly summarized Their divine character and nature when he wrote that “God *is* love” (1 John 4:8, 16).

The love of God is selfless, outflowing concern for the good of others. When He showed His glory to Moses, God revealed Himself as “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7, NIV).

Love is the foundation of the character and law of God. It is the basis of everything that God has revealed to mankind in the Holy Scriptures (Matthew 22:35-40). Paul called love the greatest Christian attribute (1 Corinthians 13:13). It is the first aspect of the fruit of God’s Spirit that he mentions (Galatians 5:22). Love is the bond of perfection, binding everything together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:14, NIV). It is the fulfilling of God’s divine law (Romans 13:10).

This amazing quality of godly love even encompasses love for one’s enemies (Matthew 5:44-45; Luke 6:35).

Love is the basis of the commitment between the Father and Christ. Jesus said, “The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand” (John 3:35). And He further said, “I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do” (John 14:31).

He told His disciples, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10). Christ is forever obedient to the Father, and we are to likewise be obedient to the Father and Christ as an expression of our love for Them. (By the way, this contradicts the Trinitarian idea that there can be no relationship of command and obedience within the Godhead, as that implies distinct beings with distinct wills.)

Upon repentance, we can begin to exhibit godly love, which is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). God wants us to learn to think as He thinks and do as He does.

In exercising this kind of love, we express the image of God (reflecting His character), even though we are still human. Paul encourages us to “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5), who perfectly personified God’s love to the point of giving His own life for us.

One of the Bible’s best-known passages tells us that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God not only wants to grant us the priceless gift of eternal life, but He also wants to share all things with us in His divine family (Hebrews 2:6-8; Romans 8:16-17). Time and time again the Scriptures reveal that God perfectly personifies love.

God’s Spirit as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV).

Each aspect of this fruit is worthy of a detailed study in itself, coupled with a self-analysis to see to what extent these traits are evident in our lives. (You can download our article reprint series on “The Fruit of the Spirit,” which explores each of these in detail, at [www.GNmagazine.org/reprints](http://www.GNmagazine.org/reprints).)

The apostle Peter sums up the process of growing to spiritual maturity: “[God’s] divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may *participate in the divine nature* and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to *make your calling and election sure*. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:3-11, NIV).

• *The Spirit of God also comforts, encourages and otherwise helps us.* Jesus Christ promised to send His followers the Holy Spirit as a “Helper” (John 14:16) or “Comforter” (King James Version). True comfort and reassurance come from God’s Spirit dwelling in us. We need not be unduly worried about what may happen to us. God’s Spirit gives us the assurance that whatever happens will work out for the good “to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

This assurance provides an outlook on life that is rare in our world. Yes, a Christian can get discouraged, but it is through the Holy Spirit that we can begin to look at life differently. As noted earlier, peace is another fruit of God’s Spirit in the life of a Christian.

When we rid our minds of the confusion over the Holy Spirit created by the Trinity teaching, we come to see the wonderful truth of how and why God works in our lives to transform us—enabling us to obey Him and grow in His way while in this physical life, that we may experience an awe-inspiring transformation in the future at Christ’s return. Now let’s examine how God’s Spirit can help lead us to our ultimate destiny!

# God's Purpose for You

*"I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18).*

As shown earlier in this booklet, the Bible reveals that *God is a family*. That family currently comprises the Being whom Jesus Christ called "the Father" and Himself, repeatedly called "the Son" or "the Son of God." Regrettably, that clear and simple truth is obscured by the incomprehensible doctrine of the Trinity.

God wants to have a *family* relationship with us. That should be obvious from a prayer that most of us have probably memorized at some point—the Lord's Prayer, in which Jesus Christ instructs us to begin, "Our Father . . ." (Matthew 6:9). God wants us to look to Him as *a Father*, not as an unexplainable three-in-one being!

Consider again the greeting Paul uses in every epistle that bears his name, in which he wishes grace and peace "from *God our Father* and the Lord Jesus Christ."

God could be presented to mankind in many ways, but the way He directed Christ to present Him was as "*our Father* in heaven."

Clearly the inspired authors of the Bible are telling us something very important!

Scripture reveals that all people have descended from the first two human beings, Adam and Eve. We are their extended family. Through direct creation in God's likeness, Adam was a son of God (Luke 3:38; compare Genesis 5:1-3). Therefore, since we are descended from Adam, we are also children of God. God is our Father because He fathered our first human father. As Acts 17:28-29 tells us, "We are the offspring of God."

But *God's purpose goes far beyond the creation of mortal, perishable human beings*. He is in the process of fashioning and forming "*a new creation*" (2 Corinthians 5:17), fathering His own spiritual children—immortal and incorruptible children imbued with His very nature and character.

The more we understand just what that means, the more awestruck we will become—at not only the majesty of God's purpose but at what this entails *for each of us personally*. And coming to see God's true nature in this regard will reveal how monumentally misleading and empty the Trinity doctrine is by comparison!

## God is creating a family

Paul explains this new creation by contrasting the "old self, which is

being corrupted by its deceitful desires," with the "new self, *created to be like God* in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24, NIV).

Paul is describing a much-needed *spiritual transformation* in people. It first involves a change in a person's nature and character. This is followed by the resurrection—a total metamorphosis into a glorified spirit being with eternal life.

God is accomplishing this transformation *through the power of the Holy Spirit*. A biblical term for this spiritual transformation is *salvation*.



*The human family was designed as a lesser model or type of the greater spiritual reality—that God is a family of which Jesus Christ is the "firstborn among many brethren."*

Paul describes those who will receive salvation as the children of God: "The Spirit itself [that is, God's Holy Spirit] beareth witness with our spirit [our individual human spirit], that *we are the children of God*: and if children, then heirs; *heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*; if so be that we suffer with him, *that we may be also glorified together*" (Romans 8:16-17, King James Version).

Can we start to grasp the significance of Paul's inspired statement? It explains why we are here, the very reason for our existence, *why we were born*. It gives meaning to life itself. It explains why God wants all people to come to the knowledge of the truth. God, the Scriptures tell us, *is creating a family*—His *own* family. We have the priceless opportunity to be a part of that family, the *family of God*!

That family relationship—our becoming *children of God the Father*—is the heart and core of God's incredible plan for humanity!

From the beginning this purpose has been clearly stated by God. Note again the words of Genesis 1, quoted earlier: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man *in Our image, according to Our likeness* . . . So God created man *in His own image* . . . male and female He created them" (verses 26-27). Men and women are created *in God's image and likeness*, to be *like Him*.

This language concerns *family*. Consider that it was after creating plants and animals to reproduce each "according to its kind" that God said, "Let Us make man *in Our image, according to Our likeness*" (verse 26). This shows that *man was created according to the "God kind."*

Indeed, to help us understand the parallel with God creating man *in His image and likeness*, Genesis 5:3 says that the first man Adam later "begot

a son *in his own likeness, after his image*, and named him Seth.” So God was essentially *reproducing Himself* through humanity. We’ll see more about this shortly.

God makes it clear that His family includes people who are now physical men and women, both sons and daughters: “For *you are all sons of God* through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).

The Bible often collectively refers to physical children of both genders as “sons” because that was the custom at the time the Bible was written. That custom has continued in many languages over the centuries. In the Hebrew and Greek languages, in which the Bible was originally written, “sons” was used to refer to “descendants” generally. We similarly use the words *mankind* and *brethren* in a collective sense to include both sexes.

God also tells us, “I will be a Father to you, and *you shall be My sons and daughters*, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18). Just as both men and women are God’s children through physical creation, so both can be God’s children *through spiritual means*.

### Can we truly be God’s children?

But when God calls us His children and instructs us to call Him our Father, is this meant in a real sense? Is God actually *engendering* a family of others like Himself through a process of reproduction? Or is this meant in the same sense as God being a Father to the human race through creation?

By act of creation God is also a Father to the angels, calling them “sons of God” in Job 38:7. But there is a more important sense in which He desires to be a Father to human beings—a privilege not bestowed on the angels.

We can start to see this in the book of Hebrews: “For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘*You are My Son, today I have begotten You*’? And again: ‘*I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son*’?”



*Just as human children are like their physical parents, our destiny as children of God is to be just like our spiritual Heavenly Father—imbued with awesome power and glory as His transformed children given eternal life.*

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(1:5). In this passage, a comparison is being drawn between the status of the angels and that of Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God. Yet there is an application to human beings more broadly here as well.

Jesus, we must recognize, stands in a unique position as God’s “only begotten Son” (John 1:18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9). As the divine Word, He was God with the Father before His human conception (John 1:1-3, 14). Then, through God the Father exercising the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word was supernaturally conceived as the human being Jesus Christ in the womb of Mary while she was yet a virgin (Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:20).

Jesus had no immediate human father. Rather, God the Father was Jesus’ father even in a physical sense through the Holy Spirit acting in the physical realm. Simultaneously, Jesus was also begotten of the Father to spiritual life through the same Spirit (compare John 5:26; 6:63).

And at His resurrection, following His death, Christ returned to His former glory with the Father, having prayed shortly before He died, as earlier quoted, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5).

While other human beings are not *physically* conceived the supernatural way Christ was, they *can* follow Him in being *spiritually* fathered by God—though later in their physical existence. Converted Christians are also referred to as “*begotten*” of God (1 Peter 1:3; 1 John 5:1, 18, KJV), as *children of God* (John 1:12; Romans 8:16, 21; 1 John 3:1-2), as *sons of God* (Matthew 5:9; Romans 8:14, 19; Galatians 3:26) and, as earlier stated, as God’s “*sons and daughters*” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

Indeed, they are described in 1 Peter 1:23 as “having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed [Greek *sperma*—that is, not of a male sperm cell fertilizing a female egg to produce only mortal, perishable life], but of incorruptible [seed], through the word of God, which liveth and abideth” (American Standard Version).

This incorruptible, imperishable life to which they are led by Scripture comes by God implanting His Holy Spirit within them, for “the Spirit alone gives eternal life” (John 6:63, New Living Translation). Indeed, the Holy Spirit, as the power of God, is the agency of spiritual conception.

Note again Paul’s words in Romans 8:16: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (KJV). And through that Spirit it becomes possible for us to be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), the very nature of God.

Returning to the book of Hebrews, we should understand that the language of being begotten by God, while not applicable to the angels, is applicable not just to Jesus Christ *but also to His followers*. “Angels,” we are told, “are only servants—spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation” (1:14, NLT).



These converted human beings are God's children, Christ's brothers who, like Him, are begotten of God. Christ, we are further told, is "bringing *many* sons to glory . . . For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one [that is, of the same Father or the same family, other translations note], *for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren*" (2:10-11).

Jesus is to be the "*firstborn* among *many* brethren" (Romans 8:29). These must be "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6) to become like Him, who now, as a "life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45), sits "at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12).

Indeed, they will yet join Him in glory as fellow "sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:36)—Christ being the "*firstborn* from the *dead*" (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5).

Thus it should be plain that Spirit-converted Christians *truly and literally become God's children through spiritual regeneration*—being begotten again through the Holy Spirit to new life. So God really is producing us according to His "kind," as Genesis 1 implies—not just as physical models in the flesh but *as spiritual entities like Himself* (John 4:24).

A few verses have been read to say that Christians are *adopted* sons of God rather than His actual begotten sons, but this is based on a misunder-

## The Likeness of God

In Genesis 1:26, God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"—the plural "Us" and "Our" denoting both God the Father and the Word who would later be born in the flesh as Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14). What is meant by God's *image* and *likeness* here?

Most importantly, God made us like Him in qualities of mind, such as abstract thought, emotion, creativity and planning—and that is probably intended here to some degree in a figurative sense. But the underlying Hebrew words used here concern *actual form and appearance*. The word *tselem* ("image") has the sense of a statue, while *demuwth* ("likeness") refers to physical resemblance.

Yet, as John 4:24 tells us, "God is Spirit." The Greek word translated "spirit" here and elsewhere in the New Testament is *pneuma*. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated "spirit" is *ruach*.

Both these terms can also mean "breath" or "wind." Because wind is formless, some argue

that immaterial spirit cannot have form and shape. Yet in many places in Scripture God and angelic spirits are described as having bodily form. Thus it is apparent that spirit must be able to have form and shape—and God the Father and Christ have the same form and shape as the human beings who are patterned after Them on a lesser, material level.

The "wind" comparison comes from the fact that spirit is invisible to human eyes unless physically manifested. Also, spirit can exist in a formless state, such as God's Holy Spirit being everywhere, filling the entire universe (Jeremiah 23:24).

God appeared in human form to a few people in the Old Testament (Genesis 18; 32:24, 30; Exodus 24:9-10; Joshua 5:13-15). In these manifestations, though, God did not reveal His full, shining glory because the intensity would have been unbearable. As God told Moses, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live" (Exodus 33:20). Yet Moses, shielded

standing (see our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* to learn more).

### We will be like Jesus Christ

Recognizing that we're made in God's image and to follow in Christ's footsteps into future glory, let's give further thought to what this entails. When all is said and done, how completely can we be like God?

God's purpose is *to make us fully like Jesus Christ!* In Ephesians 4 Paul makes this clear. He explains that members of God's Church are to "*come . . . to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (verse 13). Paul's comment in Galatians 4:19, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again *until Christ is formed in you*," expresses the same concept in different words.

Do you glimpse the significance of what Paul is saying in explaining that we will have the fullness of Christ? We can become fully and completely like Jesus Christ, with His character formed in us. But that's not all!

As we've seen, Jesus, the Son of God, is also God the Son. He is God *along with* God the Father—two divine Beings united in profound oneness.

As Jesus is God's Son, *our destiny is also to be the immortal children of God*. Of course, Jesus is God's Son in a unique way, as we've seen.

Unlike us, He was the divine Word of God from eternity with the Father

by God's power, *was* allowed to see God's radiant form from the back (verse 23).

A few supernatural visions in Scripture do give us glimpses into the awesome appearance of God in His supreme splendor. The prophet Ezekiel recorded what he saw:

"There was a form with the appearance of a human on the throne high above. From what seemed to be His waist up, I saw a gleam like amber, with what looked like fire enclosing it all around. From what seemed to be His waist down, I also saw what looked like fire. There was a brilliant light all around Him. The appearance of the brilliant light all around was like that of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day. This was the appearance of the form of the LORD's glory" (Ezekiel 1:26-28, HCSB).

The Old Testament appearances of God were not of God the Father, since John 1:18 says of Him, "No one has seen God at any time" and Jesus said, "You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form" (John 5:37). Rather, these were appearances of Jesus Christ before His human life. Again, though, the Father and

Christ share the same image and likeness.

In the New Testament book of Revelation, the apostle John saw the glorified Jesus Christ as "someone 'like a son of man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters . . . His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance" (1:13-16, New International Version).

This is a limited description of the likeness of God that human beings will also have in full when they are glorified at the resurrection to eternal life—when "those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:2-3, NRSV). This is the future God has planned for you—*your* destiny, if you embrace it fully with an obedient heart and remain a dedicated and faithful follower of God and His teachings as revealed in the Holy Scriptures!

(John 1:1). Nevertheless, the New Testament declares that Jesus is, as we've also seen, "the *firstborn* among many brethren" (Romans 8:29) and makes clear that His followers are *also* the sons of God.

The apostle John explains what this ultimately means: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called *children of God!* . . . Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-3).

With our finite human minds and limited understanding, we cannot know all there is to know about God. Nor can we fully comprehend what it means to be divine, glorified spirit beings as God the Father and Jesus Christ are now. But we do have this promise—that human beings inducted into the family God is creating will ultimately be *glorified spirit beings like the resurrected Jesus Christ* (Philippians 3:20-21), who reigns over the universe in His glorified state at the right hand of God the Father!

This is what is meant by Daniel's description of righteous people in the future "shin[ing] . . . *like the stars forever and ever*" (Daniel 12:2-3, NRSV). Human beings resurrected to eternal life will be *like the glorified Jesus Christ!*

But what does this really mean? Let's grasp some crucial points. Consider that human children are *like* their parents and *like* their brothers and sisters. They are all the same kind of beings—*human* beings. In the same way, ultimately God's children will be *like* Him and *like* Jesus Christ their divine Brother.

Jesus Christ, God the Son, is *like* God the Father—with the same kind of glory and power. These passages of Scripture tell us that God's other children, glorified when resurrected, will be *like* the Father and Christ! They will be *the same kind of beings* the Father and Christ are—*divine* beings, as hard as that may be to believe!

The awesome potential of any person, as it is presented to us in God's Word, seems so incredible that most people cannot grasp this biblical truth when they first read it. Although it is plainly stated in the Bible, people usually read right over it. In fact, this awesome future is *the whole purpose and reason* that God made mankind. It is why we were born, why we exist!

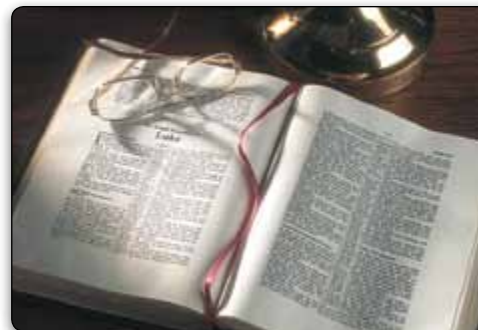
Sadly, belief in the Trinity blinds millions of people to this awe-inspiring truth. The Trinity presents God as three divine persons who are simultaneously one—and as forever this closed group, no more and no less. This unbiblical teaching obscures the awesome truth that *God is expanding His family!* Now consisting of the Father and the Son, that family will expand by, as Hebrews 2:10 tells us, "bringing many sons to glory"!

### You are gods?

Let's get to the heart of this matter. The Jews of Jesus' day accused

Him of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God: "Because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (John 10:33).

Notice His intriguing response: "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law [in Psalm 82:6], 'I said, 'You are gods''? If He [God] called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God''?" (John 10:34-36).



*To understand our purpose and reason for being, we must look to the Bible, the revelation of the One who created us. It is there that we find revealed our incredible destiny—to be glorified and given eternal life in the family of God!*

In other words, said Christ, "If Scripture outright called human beings *gods*, why are you upset when I merely state that I am God's *Son*?"

Yet are human beings actually gods? What did He mean?

In Psalm 82:6, from which Jesus quoted, God says to human beings, "I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.'" The key here is the word *children*, just as we've seen in other verses. We must understand that God is a *family—a divine fam-*

*ily of more than one person.* As we've seen in this booklet, there is *one* God (the God *family*) comprising *more* than one God *Being*.

As previously explained, the God family from the beginning comprised two divine Beings—God and the Word, the latter becoming flesh 2,000 years ago as the Son of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14). After Jesus' human life and death, He was resurrected to divine spirit existence as the "*firstborn* from the dead" (Colossians 1:18) and "*firstborn among many brethren*" (Romans 8:29). Thus Jesus was spiritually born in the resurrection as the *first* of many "brethren" or children to follow later.

Again, as pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, Acts 17:28-29 states that human beings are God's "offspring" (the Greek word *genos* here meaning "kindred," "race," "kind," "stock" or "family"). And as we saw from Genesis 1, God's purpose in creating man in His own image and likeness was to make him according to the "God kind"—to thus reproduce Himself through mankind.

Psalm 82 is much easier to understand in this light. In verse 6 the word *gods* is equated with "children of the Most High." That makes perfect sense. When any entity bears offspring, its offspring are *the same kind* of

entity. The offspring of cats are cats. The offspring of dogs are dogs. The offspring of human beings are human beings. The offspring of God are, in Christ's own words, "gods."

But we must be careful here. Human beings are not *literally* gods—not yet, at any rate. Indeed, people initially are not literally even God's children, except in the sense that He created humanity and did so in His image and likeness.

In Psalm 82, when human beings are referred to as *gods*—in the sense of being God's offspring intended to represent Him in authority and judgment throughout the earth—they are still declared imperfect and subject to corruption and death. So they are of the divine family in only a restricted sense.

One aspect of this is that man has been created in God's image and likeness on a physical, mortal level with limited dominion, resembling God but without His divine character and glory. Another aspect of this is that man has the *ultimate potential* of becoming the same kind of beings the Father and Christ now are.

In fact, God often "calletth those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17, KJV)—looking on His purpose as already accomplished. Amazingly, God's purpose is to *exalt human beings* from this

fleshly existence *to the same level of divine spirit existence* that He has, as we will see.

### **Toward the ultimate outcome—divine glory**

This involves the process mentioned earlier of *spiritual* reproduction in which God fathers us as His children. Indeed, with a more complete picture now of what God is doing, let's revisit that for a moment. The spiritual reproductive process starts with God's Spirit joining with our human spirit. Again: "The Spirit itself beareth witness

with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16, KJV). Through this miraculous union, we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

Thus the Spirit-begotten Christian is a child of God, an actual member of the God family—but not yet in an ultimate sense. As children,



*Spirit-begotten Christians are called children of God and members of the God family—though not in the ultimate sense. Like human children, we must still go through a development process in this life—one of growing and developing righteous character, becoming more and more like God.*

we must still go through a *development process* in this life—a period of building godly character, becoming more and more like God in the way we think and behave. And at the end of this life, in the resurrection at Christ's return, true Christians will be changed into divine spirit beings like the Father and Christ.

Look once again at this amazing truth recorded by the apostle John: "Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

In fact, to expand on this, we are told in numerous passages of Scripture that we will receive the divine glory of the Father and Christ: "In his kindness God called you *to share in his eternal glory* by means of Christ Jesus" (1 Peter 5:10, NLT; see also Romans 5:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Colossians 1:27; Hebrews 2:10).

Moreover, as coinheritors with Christ, we will receive dominion over all things, including the entire vast universe—dominion just as Christ has (compare Romans 8:17; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:5-9; Revelation 21:7). To truly exercise dominion over all things—including the raging thermonuclear furnaces of 50 billion trillion suns and every subatomic particle of every atom of every molecule in the cosmic expanse—*requires the omnipotent power of God*.

And what about our minds? As human beings, we couldn't count all the individual stars of the universe, at one per second, in a trillion lifetimes. But God, in a passing remark, says He knows all the stars by name (Psalm 147:4). Amazingly, Paul states, "Now I know in part, but then I shall know *just as I also am known* [that is, by God]" (1 Corinthians 13:12), showing that we will possess the omniscience of God. And why not, for we will have the Holy Spirit, the mind of God, in full!

Consider this: Converted human beings are to one day possess divine nature, divine glory and total power over the creation, sharing God's infinite knowledge. *All of this requires nothing less than divinity!*

Indeed, at that time, like Jesus, we will at last be "*filled with all the fullness of God*" (Ephesians 3:19; compare Colossians 1:19; 2:9). How can



*The inheritance God has promised to those who become part of His family is staggering to contemplate—it is nothing less than the entire vast universe and unseen spirit realm.*



someone be “filled with all the fullness of God” and be anything *less* than what God is? Therefore, at our ultimate change, we too *will be divine*—though the Father and Christ will forever be greater than us in authority and majesty.

### The teaching of deification

This biblical truth will surely come as quite a shock to those who have heard only the traditional view of mainstream Christianity regarding the ultimate reward of the righteous. Yet those who might be quick to assail this teaching will perhaps be even more surprised to learn that many early “church fathers” of mainstream tradition—not so far removed from early apostolic teaching and before the Trinity doctrine took root—*did understand* this incredible truth, at least in part. And hints of this are sometimes seen even today.

Notice paragraphs 398 and 460 of the current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995), footnoted sources in brackets:

“Created in a state of holiness, man was destined to be fully ‘divinized’ by God in glory [but sinned] . . .

“The Word became flesh to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’ [2 Peter 1:4]: ‘For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with

the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God’ [Irenaeus (2nd century), *Against Heresies* Book 3, chap. 19, sec. 1].

“‘For the Son of God became man *so that we might become God*’ [Athanasius (4th century), *On the Incarnation of the Word*, chap. 54, sec. 3]. ‘The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us share in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, *might make men gods*’ [Thomas Aquinas (13th century), *Opusculum* 57, lectures 1-4]” (pp. 112, 128-129, emphasis added).

This teaching is even more prevalent in Eastern Orthodox tradition, where it is known by the Greek term *theosis*, meaning “divinization” or “deification.” It is wholly unlike the New Age concept of absorption into universal consciousness or seeing oneself as inherently and presently divine. Notice the remarkable explanation of the early theologian Tertullian, writing around A.D. 200:

“It would be impossible that another God could be admitted, when it is permitted to no other being to possess anything of God. Well, then, you say, at that rate we ourselves possess nothing of God. But indeed we do, and will continue to do so. Only it is from *Him* that we receive it, and not from *ourselves*.

“*For we will be even gods*, if we deserve to be among those of whom He declared, ‘I have said, “You are gods,”’ and ‘God stands in the congregation

## Do Some Verses Deny a Divine Family?

As this booklet explains, the Bible reveals that the one God is a family, presently consisting of God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. And God is in the process of adding to the divine family multitudes of others—eventually all human beings who are willing and who faithfully choose to follow God’s way.

Yet there are some passages of Scripture that might at first glance seem to deny any plurality in the Godhead. Unitarians latch onto such verses to argue that Jesus cannot be God along with the Father while many Trinitarians use such verses to deny man’s destiny of becoming part of the God family.

In Deuteronomy 32:39 God states, “Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me.” In Isaiah 45:5 He says, “I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me.”

And Isaiah 44:6 tells us, “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God.’”

So can the Father and Christ both be God in light of these verses? Yes, They can. According to several passages in the New Testament, the One who spoke these words was the One who became Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus refers to Himself as the First and the Last in the book of Revelation (1:11; 17: 2:8; 22:13). Yet wouldn’t the Father, then, be another God besides Him? No—the Father is not another God. Rather, the Father and Jesus Christ are *both* God. But how so?

Trinitarians would argue that this is because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one triune being. But the true explanation is that the one God is the one God *family*. In fact, the Hebrew word for “God”

in these verses is the plural *Elohim* (see “*Elohim: The Plurality of God*” on page 50). Yet so unified is the family that Christ as divine Spokesman speaks with singular voice on the Father’s behalf.

The real message in these pronouncements is that there is no other God apart from the true God—that is, outside the God family now consisting of two divine Beings, the Father and the Son. In short, the God family alone is God. This even allows for the addition of others to the divine family—a truth spelled out in Scripture, as explained in this chapter.

But what of the following verses? In Isaiah 42:8 God says, “I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images.” Does that mean human beings cannot receive divine glory? Other passages reveal that God will indeed share His divine glory with His children who are transformed into His image. What, then, is meant here? Note that in parallel, God will not share praise with idols. We should understand His not sharing glory in

the same way. God will not share divine glory with any false gods. Rather, the true God’s glory is reserved exclusively for the true God—but, again, the true God means the one God family to which others will yet be added.

And lastly, God states in Isaiah 43:10, “Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.” Again, the word “God” here is translated from the plural *Elohim*. And *of course* no God could be formed before or after God—for there is *no such time* as before or after God, who is eternal. The point here is that God has always been God and always will be. He will never be replaced. And those who are added to the family are not separately formed gods but, rather, spring from the Father’s very being as His own children—becoming part of the one God family with the Father and Christ.

Thus, none of these verses contradict the biblical truth that God is a family—presently with two divine members, the Father and Jesus Christ, and multitudes more yet to be added.

of the gods.’ But this comes of His own grace, not from any property in us. For it is He alone who *can make gods*” (*Against Hermogenes*, chap. 5, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, p. 480, quoted in “Deification of Man,” David Bercot, editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 1998, p. 200).

Indeed, this was the commonly accepted view during the early Christian centuries (see our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* for more on this).

Some of the later theologians of this early period were, despite this understanding, veering into developing Trinitarianism. Yet earlier theologians show no hint of Trinitarian ideas. Consider this remarkable statement from the second-century bishop Irenaeus, who was taught when young by a disciple of the apostle John: “There is none other called God by the Scriptures except the Father of all, and the Son, and those who possess the adoption [i.e., sonship as God’s children]” (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, preface).

So rather than the Trinitarian one God in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Irenaeus proclaimed one God that includes the Father, the Son

## The God Family

Scripture clearly states that there is only one God (Isaiah 46:9; Malachi 2:10; Romans 3:30; James 2:19). Nevertheless, it is evident that the one God comprises more than one Being existing together as a divine family (compare Ephesians 3:14-15)—of which the human family is a physical type or model.

The Hebrew word translated “God” throughout the Old Testament is *Elohim*, a plural noun pointing to more than one almighty Being—essentially “Gods.” However, it is normally singular in usage *when referring to the true God of Israel*, being paired in such cases with singular verbs and adjectives. Where such passages are quoted in the New Testament, the Greek word used to translate the term is the singular *Theos*, meaning God.

To use an example mentioned earlier, we have a comparable example in American English of a noun being plural in form but singular in usage—the national name United States. While the plural form represents a true plurality of states, singular usage shows the constituent states to form a unit. We might say, “The United States *is* going to intervene,” but not—since the country’s early years—“The United States *are* . . .”

Thus there is one United States made up of a

plurality of states that are united. Similarly, there is one God consisting of more than one divine Being. Indeed, in two telling places in the book of Genesis, rather than using the singular pronouns “Me” or “My,” God uses the *plural* pronouns “Us” or “Our” (1:26; 3:22). The New Testament reveals two Beings as God—God the Father and the Word, the One who became Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14).

Christ’s title *the Word* refers to His position as the One who speaks and acts on the Father’s behalf (compare John 8:26-28; 12:49-50; 14:10). Numerous passages refer to Jesus Christ as God (Isaiah 9:6; John 20:27-28; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8-9).

The plural aspect of God is often taken as evidence supporting the doctrine of the Trinity, which maintains that God is three distinct persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in a single being. Yet this idea runs counter to reason and sound logic.

More importantly, this doctrine is unscriptural. Again, God—that is, the God family—at present comprises God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is never listed in Scripture as a third person who is also God. For instance, the apostle Paul says we are to be

and the multitude of other sons brought to glory (transformed believers).

More recent authors have also glimpsed the biblical truth about man’s destiny. Notice these remarkable words from C.S. Lewis, perhaps the most popular Christian writer of the last century: “The command *Be ye perfect* [Matthew 5:48] is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. *He said (in the Bible) that we were ‘gods’ and He is going to make good His words.*

“If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. *He meant what He said*” (*Mere Christianity*, 1996, p. 176).

aspiring to understand the “mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3). There is no mention here of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture shows that the Holy Spirit is not a person, but rather is the power, mind, life and shared essence of God (compare Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Romans 15:13; Romans 8:27; 1 Corinthians 2:16; John 4:24; 5:26; 6:63).

Furthermore, contrary to the Trinitarian view that the Father and Son are coequal in authority (along with the Holy Spirit), Jesus Christ not only said, “My Father . . . is greater than *all*” (John 10:29), but He also said, “My Father is greater than *I*” (John 14:28; see also 1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:27-28).

The Trinity doctrine has done much to obscure the clear truth of Scripture that God is a family. God is the name of the Father, and God is also the name of the Son—as well as of both of Them together. Moreover, God intends for this family name to also be the name of other sons He is in the process of bringing to glory, as the rest of this booklet explains (Ephesians 3:14-15; Hebrews 2:10).

Irenaeus, a second-century bishop, was right when he observed: “There is none other called God by the Scriptures except the Father of all, and the Son, and those who possess the adoption

[i.e., sonship as God’s children]” (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, preface; compare Book 3, chap. 6). Note that there is no hint here of a Trinitarian formula in this early time period. That doctrine wasn’t formulated until much later.

Regrettably, in the centuries since it was introduced, the Trinity doctrine has misled millions of people about who and what God really is. By presenting God as three divine persons who are simultaneously one, and as a closed group of three, this teaching blinds people to the truth of the Bible that *God is a family*—a family into which many others have the opportunity to enter!

Again, that family presently consists of two divine Beings, the Father and Christ, but with more to come who will likewise bear the family name. Indeed, the human family was meant as a lesser model or type of this greater spiritual reality. Marriage is another aspect of this, as it is God’s intention for those who are added to His family to enter a divine marriage relationship with Jesus Christ, the human covenant being patterned after the higher, God-plane relationship (compare Ephesians 5:22-23; Revelation 19:7-9).

To learn more about what the Bible has to say on these matters, be sure to download or request our free booklets *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*, *Who Is God?* and *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*.

### The ultimate family relationship

Of course, this matter requires some important clarification. The Bible's teaching is not that we will somehow mystically become a singular being with God, losing our individual identities. The reality is that God is *a family*. And just as individual members of a human family are distinct entities with unique identities, *so will it be in the God family*.

Yet through God's Spirit the members of the God family will share a special oneness of mind, purpose and nature that goes far beyond the common identity and union that is possible within the human family. This unity is already experienced between God the Father and Jesus Christ. The Trinity doctrine defines their oneness in terms of singleness of being. But that is clearly wrong.

There is indeed only one God, but that God is a family—with others to be added to that family. The term *gods* in reference to our destiny is really meant to distinguish multiple God *beings* constituting the one God family. Again, there are at present two fully divine members of the God family—two distinct Beings—God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. And, as incredible as it sounds, there will be *more to come*.

God has declared, as we earlier saw, "*I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters*, says the LORD Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18). *And He means it*. The Father intends to bring us forth *as His full children*, to transform us into the very kind of beings that He and Christ now are—beings of glory and majesty so incredible as to be beyond our limited human comprehension and understanding!

Even though saved human beings truly will be elevated to existence at that awesome divine level as real children of God and full members of the God family, they will never be as great in majesty and authority as God the Father and Jesus Christ. The Father and Son are uncreated, living eternally throughout time, without beginning. And there is only *one* Savior in whose name we can receive God's gift of eternal life (Acts 4:12), setting Him apart forever.

Of course, those who enter this family as glorified and immortal children of God will never challenge, individually or collectively, the preeminence



*The prophet Daniel was inspired to write that the resurrected children of God will "shine . . . like the stars forever and ever" as His glorified, immortal children!*

of the Father and Christ as leaders of the family. Truly, all will be subject to Jesus, except the Father, and Christ will Himself be subject to the Father (see 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The Father and Jesus Christ will remain at the top of the family forever, reigning supreme even with the addition of billions of divine children.

This, then, is *why you and I were born!* It is the ultimate potential destiny of all mankind. It is the awe-inspiring purpose for which we were created. As Jesus quoted, foreseeing our destiny reached, "I said, '*You are gods.*'" Our future can't get any higher or better than that!

How bankrupt and uninspired the Trinity doctrine is revealed to be beside this wondrous and overarching truth! Sadly, the distortions of Trinitarian teaching hide what God has revealed about His nature and our awesome future—twisting or obscuring the truth with egregious error. Indeed, the Trinity denies the greatest truth we can know—that God is *a growing family of which we can become part*.

What a great tragedy that the Christian world has embraced such a gargantuan fraud rooted in pagan philosophy and religion. Thankfully, the truth of God is plain for those with eyes to see. Though the truth is not incomprehensible like the Trinity, it does—in a very positive way—astound the mind in the immensity and grandeur of its scope. May you hold fast to the stunning and glorious destiny God has promised in His Word!



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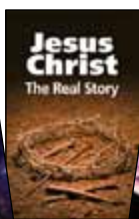
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